OLD!

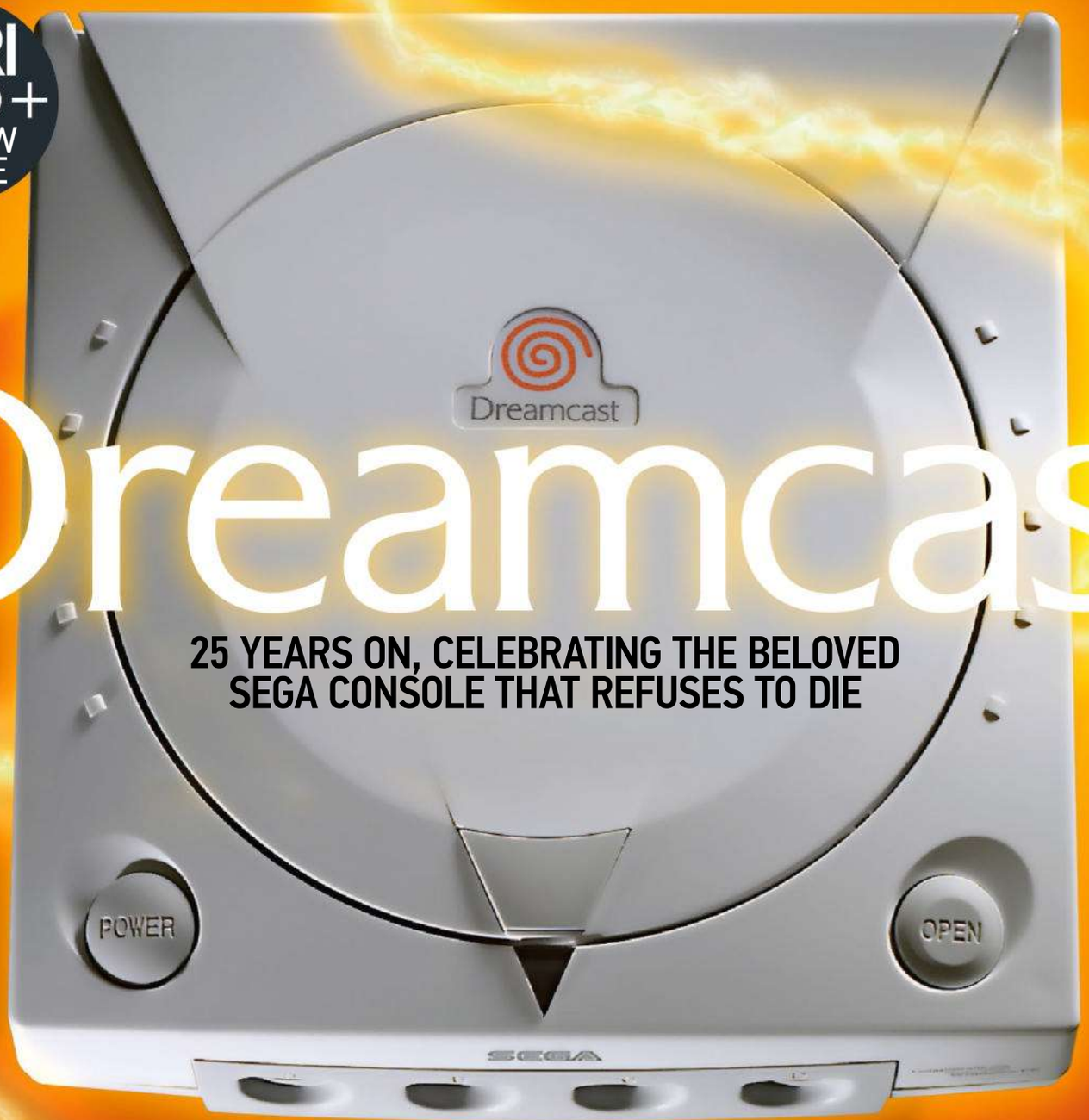
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

A TRIBUTE TO GRAFTGOLD
FROM URIDIUM TO VIROCOP, THE GAMES THAT DEFINED THE STUDIO

THE MAKING OF SPELLBOUND DIZZY
PAUL RANSON REVISITS THE FIFTH GAME IN CODEMASTERS' CRACKING SERIES

ATARI 2600+ REVIEW INSIDE



Dreamcast

25 YEARS ON, CELEBRATING THE BELOVED SEGA CONSOLE THAT REFUSES TO DIE

JAMES POND II: CODENAME ROBOCOD
YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO VECTORDEAN'S FISHY SEQUEL

THE MAKING OF COMANCHE
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE HELICOPTER HIT

FUTURE
LOAD 254

IN THE CHAIR: RAPH KOSTER
THE ULTIMA ONLINE VETERAN TALKS GAME DESIGN AND MORE

ULTIMATE GUIDE: POWER STRIKE
REVISITING COMPILE'S MAGNIFICENT 8-BIT SHMUP

ALSO INSIDE: THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR, ATARI CX78 JOYPAD, RYGAR: THE LEGENDARY ADVENTURE, PANASONIC Q, HOMEBREW

BUILD
RACE
WIN
REPEAT
MAKE WAY
OUT NOW
STEAM
ICE BEAM
SECRET MODE

LOADING...

Everyone loves an underdog story and few are as memorable in gaming circles as the tale behind Sega's Dreamcast. After squandering the success it had found with the Mega Drive on the Mega-CD, 32X and Saturn, Sega quickly found itself on the ropes with the Dreamcast – despite getting a head start on the consoles of its competitors. High-profile releases like *Shenmue*, *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Sonic Adventure* couldn't stem the bleeding and Sega officially announced its decision to leave the console market in 2001. The Dreamcast was dead. Or was it?

The fact is, if you're a fan of Sega's console you'll find it to be in rude health with a large number of genuinely great games still being made for the machine today. Hell, even some servers are up and running for online play. Join us then, as we not only celebrate the machine's 25th anniversary, but look at how fans and coders are keeping the dream alive.

Elsewhere in the issue you'll find a fantastic article on the games of Graftgold, behind-the-scenes stories about *Spellbound Dizzy* and *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*, a fascinating look at The Graphic Adventure Creator and so much more. We're even extending our fantastic subs offer for TheC64 Mini on page 32.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE DREAMCAST GAME?

DARRAN JONES

It has got to be *Rez*. A truly astonishing game with an incredible soundtrack.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Silent Hill 3*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

Power Stone was damn good fun. Cool characters and such frantic gameplay made it difficult to put down.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Marvel's Midnight Suns*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

Choosing just one feels impossible! I'll go for *Shenmue II* – it was unlike anything else I'd ever played. Sorry, *Sonic Adventure*.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Headhunter*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

I don't think I've ever held a Dreamcast controller in my hand, let alone play a game on one. Getting *Quake III* Arena to run on it was impressive though.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Total War: Rome Remastered - RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

I have a soft spot for Bizarre's *Metropolis Street Racer*. Driving stylishly to earn Kudos is such a conceit, but who doesn't want to be praised for looking cool?
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Crash Twinsanity*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

GRAEME MASON

Playing *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica* and marvelling at the brilliant 3D backgrounds.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Full Void*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

PAUL DRURY

The fab-u-lous *Space Channel 5*. I still walk into every room like I'm Ulala. Life-changing stuff.
Expertise: Name-dropping
Currently playing: *Murder Is Game Over*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

ANDREW FISHER

Soulcalibur amazed me the first time I saw it, and it still looks and plays brilliantly today.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Portal* (N64)
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

MARTYN CARROLL

Soulcalibur. I bought it at launch and was blown away by it. It was the first Dreamcast game that genuinely felt next-gen to me.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Super Mario Bros Wonder*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

CONTENTS

>> Load 254 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

6 **Main News**
Darran takes a look at the retro games and hardware arriving in 2024

8 **Iain Lee**
Our resident columnist has gone to another retro event

10 **Mr Biffo**
This month Paul ponders the huge success of Mario as a mascot

12 **A Moment With**
Freelancer Lewis Packwood discusses his brand-new book with us

16 **Back To The Noughties**
It's April 2007 and Nick has found himself in slump season

REVIVALS

18 **Agent X II: The Mad Prof's Back**
Darran revisits this budget sequel

42 **Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers**
Nick discovers he's not as good at games as he once was

66 **Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis**
Indy's best adventure? Darran thinks so

80 **Namco Classic Collection Vol 2**
Nick finds a new version of *Pac-Man*

92 **Rygar: The Legendary Adventure**
Darran plays through Tecmo's action game

112 **Exit**
Nick explains why Taito's puzzle game is perfect for the PlayStation Portable

FEATURED

34 **Peripheral Vision: Atari CX78 Joypad**
A look at the controller Atari made to combat the pads of other home consoles

44 **A Tribute To: Graftgold**
Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook on the games that defined the hit studio

58 **Retro Gamer's Favourite... Games Starring Living Toys**
Nick plays a bunch of gems, from *Micro Machines* to *Clockwork Knight*

60 **Ultimate Guide: Power Strike**
Will Freeman celebrates Compile's astonishing 8-bit shmup

74 **Hardware Heaven: Panasonic Q**
Nick takes a look at easily the most expensive variant you'll find of Nintendo's popular GameCube

76 **The Making Of: Comanche: Maximum Overkill**
Discover why voxels played such an important part in this helicopter hit

82 **Minority Report: Gamate Games**
New freelancer Mike Diver is here to share some of the best games you can play on this forgotten handheld

Don't Wake Me: 25 Years Of The Dreamcast

Nick Thorpe questions numerous industry insiders on the iconic Sega console that refuses to die

The Story Of: The Graphic Adventure Creator

Graeme Mason guides you through the creation of this incredible 8-bit program

Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | Retro Gamer Magazine | @RetroGamerMag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

FREE GIFT SUBSCRIPTION SEE PAGE 32

68

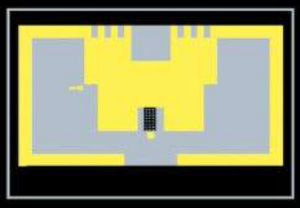
Ultimate Guide: James Pond II: Codename RoboCod

The bosses and conversions that define this wonderfully fishy sequel

86

In The Chair: Raph Koster

REVIEWS



94 Atari 2600+

96 Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

96 Berzerk: Recharged

96 Quarter Arcades: Space Invaders Part II

96 Jurassic Park: Classic Games Collection

ESSENTIALS

32 **Subscriptions**
More exciting than playing *Phantasy Star Online* for the first time

98 **Homebrew**
Andrew Fisher looks at a bunch of Vectrex games and a new *Sabre Wulf*

102 **Hot Topic: Dreamcast Memories**
Nick, Darran and Tim chat about Sega's last home console. Will there be tears?

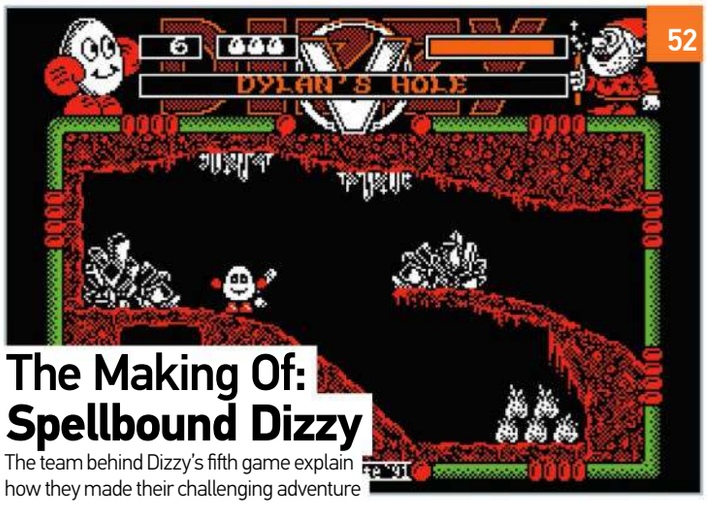
104 **Collector's Corner**
Our latest collector is a big fan of Sega's Dreamcast and has quite the collection

106 **My Retro Life**
Paul Drury looks back at the many gaming celebrities he has interviewed

108 **Mailbag**
Another month of great letters. Please keep sending them

111 **Next Month**
Can you guess which game will make the cover?

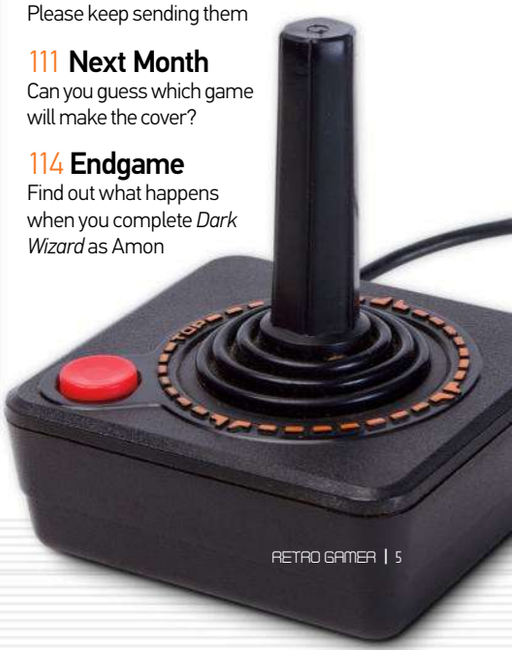
114 **Endgame**
Find out what happens when you complete *Dark Wizard* as Amon



52

The Making Of: Spellbound Dizzy

The team behind Dizzy's fifth game explain how they made their challenging adventure



» [Switch] The remaster of *The Sands Of Time* is nowhere to be seen, but at least *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown* looks fun.

IN THE PIPELINE

The retro goodness you can expect in 2024

CONTENTS

6 IN THE PIPELINE
From the Spectrum Next to a new *Tekken* release, Darran takes a look at the games and hardware you can enjoy in 2024

8 IAIN LEE
If you missed this year's Play Expo event, Iain's column will make you feel like you were there

10 MR BIFFO
Do you think Mario is the ultimate gaming mascot? Paul reckons there's a good chance he is

12 A MOMENT WITH
Freelancer Lewis Packwood stops by to tell Nick about his brand-new book that charts gaming's quirkier systems

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
Nick continues his time-travelling adventure and discovers what was happening back in May 2007

It's hard to believe, but 2024 is just around the corner. While we're more than happy to live in the past on the magazine, the ever-evolving world of retro gaming means there's always plenty to look forward to, whether it's new hardware or new games. So join us as we look at some of the items you should be able to enjoy in the coming 12 months.

If you're one of the Spectrum fans that backed the second wave of the Spectrum Next on Kickstarter it should hopefully now be with you. The machine was originally planned for August 2021, but COVID-19 and chip shortages were just two of the challenges the team faced in getting the system to market. The Analogue Duo should also be arriving shortly, if it hasn't already, and promises to be another excellent piece of hardware. Look out for our review in our next issue. More information should also be forthcoming about the Analogue 3D, Analogue's new system based on the N64. No release date has been given yet and we're just expecting more detailed information in 2024 rather than an actual release date.

» While we're not fans of the cartridge colour, we do like the idea of not spending £1,000 on *Eliminate Down*.

Retro Games Ltd, the publisher behind THE A500 Mini has not only announced that a full-size Amiga will be arriving in 2024, but that a new Mini system will appear before that, with another full-size system arriving in 2025. We're fully expecting the new system to be the CD32, but will have more official news as soon as it arrives. Playmaji's Polymega N64 module should also be more easily available in 2024 and it's also hoping to reveal updates on its planned Atari module, its official lightgun and a brand-new project as well. The same can be said for Mike Chi's RetroTink 4K upscaler which started shipping as we went to press and the OSSC Pro. You can expect a review of the former early next year.

> "Earthion is a new Mega Drive release by the legendary Yuzo Koshiro"

2024 is looking like a good year for games as well. Nintendo has remakes of Cing's *Another Code* games planned for January, while *Mario Vs Donkey Kong* drops in February. *Princess Peach: Showtime!* makes its debut in March, meaning the first quarter of the year will be pretty busy for Nintendo. There's plenty more to look forward to as well. *Alone In The Dark* arrives in early January, while *Tekken 8* and *Like A Dragon: Infinite Wealth*, the latest game in the *Yakuza* series, both arrive at the end of the month. Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia: The Lost Crown* will also appear in January, as will R-*Type Tactics I•II Cosmos*.

2023 was a good year for Blaze Entertainment, with 94 games released across 15 cartridges.

» [PC] *Tekken 8* appears in January, meaning 2024 should get off to an explosive start.

» [Switch] We were big fans of Cing's games, so it's great to see them reaching a new audience.

» Read-Only Memory's new *WipEout* book looks fantastic. Nick is really looking forward to it.

» The Analogue Duo is one of several retro systems that has taken a while to get to market, but the wait should be worth it.

While no announcements have yet been made as we went to press, we're expecting new carts to be announced in late-December/ early January. Don't be surprised if a couple of new Super Pockets release later in 2024 as well.

Shmup fans have plenty to be excited about next year. *Earthion* is a new Mega Drive release by the legendary Yuzo Koshiro and is currently planned for the summer, with a physical version in the West courtesy of Limited Run Games. The legendary Mega Drive shmup *Eliminate Down* is getting a reissue courtesy of Retro-Bit Gaming. Preorders finish on 2 Jan though, so make sure you don't miss it. 2024 is looking like a good year for M2. It recently released *DoDonPachi DaiOuJou* and we'd be very surprised if it doesn't have another collection in its *Arcade Garage* series planned for later in the year. It's also working alongside developers of Compile Heart on a brand-new shmup and is still beavering away on *Aleste Branch*.

If you're looking for some retro reading in 2024 some books have already been announced. Read-Only Memory is planning to ship *WipEout: Futurism* later in the year, which is looking like the definitive tome on the popular series. If you've enjoyed Chris Scullion's recent *Dreamcast Encyclopedia*, you'll be pleased to hear that his *Game Boy Encyclopedia* is planned for September 2024. It will feature every Game Boy game as well as every Game Boy Color release. In fact, Game Boy Color fans will be well catered for in 2024 as Ninty Media's *GameBook Color: The Unofficial GBC Companion* has just passed its funding goal. If it's anything like Ninty Media's *GameBook* it will be well worth a read. This month's new freelancer, Mike Diver also has two new projects due in 2024. *The Con50le: 50 Years Of Video Home Gaming* will arrive early in 2024 courtesy of White Owl, while *From Coin-Ops To Table-Tops: The Essential Electronic Games Guide* will arrive via Numskull Designs shortly after.

So there you have it, 2024 is shaping up to be a cracking year for retro gaming with plenty of great things to look forward to. Look out for reviews and coverage in future issues.

CRASH LIVE! IS A SMASH

The recent Crash Live! event was such a success that the next event has already been announced. Crash Live! 2024 is planned for 23 November 2024 and will once again be held at Kenilworth's Holiday Inn. Feedback for this year's event has been great due to a large range of machines to play on and a selection of brilliant guests that included Andrew Braybrook, Steve Turner, Ian Oliver and Charles Cecil. **Retro Gamer**'s own Martyn Carroll attended the show and was very impressed with it, saying, "Crash Live! 2023 was another wonderful community event from Chris [Wilkins] and the team. I was chatting away with folks so much I managed to miss all the Q&A talks, although I hear they were excellent. I also got schooled playing *Jetpac* and bought lots of lovely tat. Roll on next year!"

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Play Expo

Last week I went to the Play Expo retro exhibition in Blackpool. While it was only a week ago for me, for you it was possibly significantly longer. I write these articles quite a while before the magazine gets printed. It's a kind of time travel, which I guess Play Expo also was. A huge and wonderful step back in time. I had a great day, once I found the right door to get in. I was helped by two very kind gentlemen. When I mentioned I wrote for **Retro Gamer** they realised who I was. It's always nice to be called "a legend" even if it's clearly nonsense!

The kindness and niceness followed me throughout the Saturday I was there. I've said before, there really is something very special and loving about the retro gaming world. No need to email, I'm sure there are some right ********* out there, there always are. Thankfully I haven't met any yet.

Being honest, it was a bit too noisy for me. My ADHD means I am particularly sensitive to noise and as I walked into the main hall I was physically pushed back by the sheer volume of games dinging away and punters milling about. A few people stopped to say hello, say how much they liked my podcasts, radio shows and **Retro Gamer** itself. Most got on with the business in hand – playing *Out Run*, *Sonic* and the like.

Highlights for me include finally getting a go on a ColecoVision. This has always been a mystery to me since I was told at the age of eight that a kid in our street had one. I'd always looked excitedly at any picture of this beast that I saw in magazines. While it was pretty basic, I actually really enjoyed it. The controller played nothing like I expected it to. And it has to be said, it is a beautiful-looking machine.

> "The talk by John Romero was awesome. It's so lovely to see someone enjoy their life and work so much"

The talk by John Romero, the co-creator of *Doom*, was awesome. It's so lovely to see someone enjoy their life and work so much. I wanted to go and say hi, but you know what? I was too damned shy. Isn't that something?

The best news is I didn't spend any money. Firstly, I'm skint, and secondly I didn't fancy lugging a huge bit of kit home on the six-hour train journey. While there were some amazing stalls and stuff for sale, I resisted, that has to be a victory!

Oh, I nearly forgot. I met a lovely YouTuber called Slopes. He does some superb videos on the history of retro games and also calls out Kickstarter scammers. I've been obsessed with his Tommy Tallarico videos. Tommy is a wonderful character who claims he created the "Oof!" sound in *Roblox*. If you fancy a laugh, watch Slopes' video on Tommy and his attempt to make a new Intellivision console.

All in all, a thoroughly good time was had by all. The only downside – the hotel I stayed in. When a hotel has a fight going on outside your room at 1:30am and stains on the wall and ceiling, you know you're not in a 5-star establishment. If I'd been a contestant on *Four In A Bed*, I'd have knocked off about 50 quid. *

Photo credit: Evan Amos

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

PAPER REVOLUTION

74% of paper and 83% of paper-based packaging is recycled into new products; one of the highest recycling rates of any material in Europe!

Sources: Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), 2020 and Eurostat, 2018.
Europe: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

Discover the story of paper
www.lovepaper.org

Scan for paper facts, activities, blogs and much more!

LOVE PAPER®

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

A mascot for the ages

***Super Mario Bros Wonder* is all a bit good, but… it left me pondering.** In short: what's the deal with Mario? No, that isn't the first gag of my upcoming stand-up comedy special (please note: I don't have an upcoming stand-up comedy special). Why is he popular in and of himself? Yes, he has been fortunate enough to grace some of the greatest videogames of all time. Yes, he boasts a design that has become iconic – from the trademark hat and facial fur to the catchphrases. Yes, he's surrounded by an equally iconic cast of friends and enemies.

But… as corporate mascots go… does he make any sense? Isn't it a bit weird that a Japanese videogames company should present an Italian-American plumber as its public face? How did it happen? Was it just sheer force of will on the part of Nintendo? The seismic impact of *Super Mario Bros*? Is there anything inherent in the character that could explain it?

You can be sure that if he'd been created by committee, in the modern climate, Mario would've been workshopped and brainstormed into oblivion. He's short and dumpy and not particularly sexy. He is, if nothing else, an argument against focus-group testing.

I mean, Sonic The Hedgehog I get. Anthropomorphic animals and things with faces are the go-to for a corporate mascot (Tony The Tiger, the M&Ms, the Duracell Bunny). Sonic's a bit like Mickey Mouse, right? But… y'know… with attitude.

Although, let's be frank, the extent of Sonic's attitude seems to be tapping his foot and waggling his finger (to be fair, they never specified what kind of attitude Sonic had; perhaps it's the attitude of an impatient librarian?). Plus, in terms of being the mascot of a videogames company, Sonic was designed to be fast, thus underscoring the supposed speed of Sega's Mega Drive. There was intent behind it.

Mario falls more into the camp of Ronald McDonald and the bloke on the Pringles tubes; mascots that seem to have zero logical connection to the thing they're selling, and are the mascots because the company says they are. Mario isn't even cool. He's seemingly a middle-aged man, a blue collar worker, who – outside of the Mushroom Kingdom – is presumably up to his elbow in lavatory juice. But perhaps that's the secret; Mario is an everyman. He's not a super-fast hedgehog, a genetically-engineered space warrior, or a bloodthirsty upper-crust archaeologist.

His powers come from the things he finds laying around. He's not a king or a prince or a superhero in the traditional sense. When you look back at his games beyond the through-line of the main *Mario* series, he's a tennis player, a golfer, footballer, a typist, owner of a cement factory, a builder, a doctor… in the Game & Watch title *Mario's Bombs Away* he was even drafted into the army. He's a plumber in name only, beyond the fact he sometimes climbs down pipes. Rarely, if ever, have we seen him with a toolkit full of wrenches and pipe benders.

Mario's flexibility is precisely what defines him, and why that makes him not just the perfect corporate mascot, but the perfect videogame character.

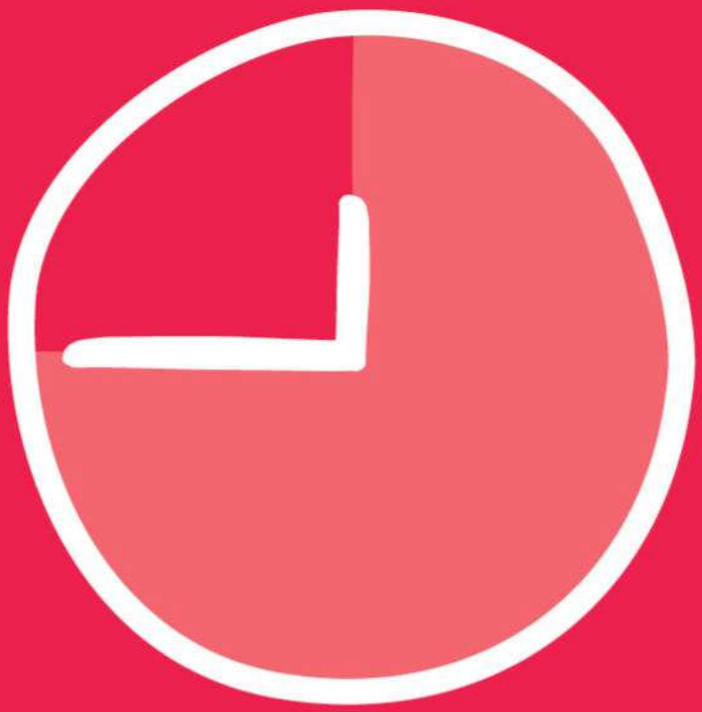
> "He's short and dumpy and not particularly sexy"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

THE BRAIN TUMOUR CHARITY

A CURE CAN'T WAIT



EVERY 46 MINUTES SOMEONE IS DIAGNOSED WITH A BRAIN TUMOUR.

Work with us to accelerate a cure

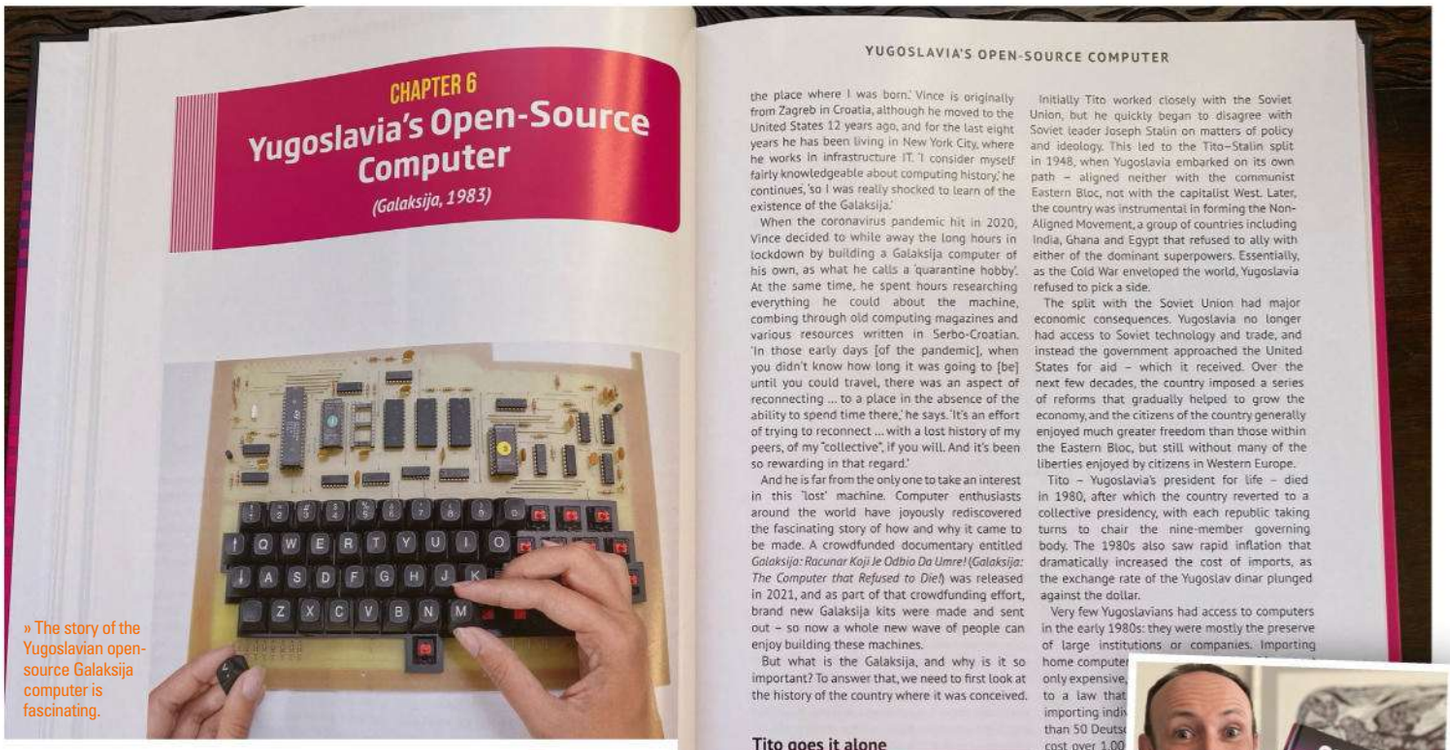
Brain tumours affect more than 11,000 people every year and survival rates are among the lowest of all cancers. We need your support to help us get closer to defeating brain tumours.

Text DEFEAT5 to 70507 to donate £5, please help us to fi nd a cure.

thebraintumourcharity.org

© The Brain Tumour Charity 2020. Registered Charity in England and Wales (1150054) and Scotland (SC045081)

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR


CHAPTER 6
Yugoslavia's Open-Source Computer
(Galaksija, 1983)

YUGOSLAVIA'S OPEN-SOURCE COMPUTER

the place where I was born.' Vince is originally from Zagreb in Croatia, although he moved to the United States 12 years ago, and for the last eight years he has been living in New York City, where he works in infrastructure IT. 'I consider myself fairly knowledgeable about computing history,' he continues, 'so I was really shocked to learn of the existence of the Galaksija.'

When the coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, Vince decided to while away the long hours in lockdown by building a Galaksija computer of his own, as what he calls a 'quarantine hobby'. At the same time, he spent hours researching everything he could about the machine, combing through old computing magazines and various resources written in Serbo-Croatian. 'In those early days [of the pandemic], when you didn't know how long it was going to [be] until you could travel, there was an aspect of reconnecting ... to a place in the absence of the ability to spend time there,' he says. 'It's an effort of trying to reconnect ... with a lost history of my peers, of my "collective", if you will. And it's been so rewarding in that regard.'

And he is far from the only one to take an interest in this 'lost' machine. Computer enthusiasts around the world have joyously rediscovered the fascinating story of how and why it came to be made. A crowdfunded documentary entitled *Galaksija: Racunar Koji Je Odbio Da Umre!* (*Galaksija: The Computer that Refused to Die!*) was released in 2021, and as part of that crowdfunding effort, brand new Galaksija kits were made and sent out – so now a whole new wave of people can enjoy building these machines.

But what is the Galaksija, and why is it so important? To answer that, we need to first look at the history of the country where it was conceived.

Tito goes it alone

Yugoslavia was formed after the First World War, following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The country was a kingdom up until the Second World War, when it was invaded by the ... powers, forcing the king into exile. A Partisan ...stance led by Josip Broz Tito fought against

Initially Tito worked closely with the Soviet Union, but he quickly began to disagree with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin on matters of policy and ideology. This led to the Tito–Stalin split in 1948, when Yugoslavia embarked on its own path – aligned neither with the communist Eastern Bloc, not with the capitalist West. Later, the country was instrumental in forming the Non-Aligned Movement, a group of countries including India, Ghana and Egypt that refused to ally with either of the dominant superpowers. Essentially, as the Cold War enveloped the world, Yugoslavia refused to pick a side.

The split with the Soviet Union had major economic consequences. Yugoslavia no longer had access to Soviet technology and trade, and instead the government approached the United States for aid – which it received. Over the next few decades, the country imposed a series of reforms that gradually helped to grow the economy, and the citizens of the country generally enjoyed much greater freedom than those within the Eastern Bloc, but still without many of the liberties enjoyed by citizens in Western Europe.

Tito – Yugoslavia's president for life – died in 1980, after which the country reverted to a collective presidency, with each republic taking turns to chair the nine-member governing body. The 1980s also saw rapid inflation that dramatically increased the cost of imports, as the exchange rate of the Yugoslav dinar plunged against the dollar.

Very few Yugoslavians had access to computers in the early 1980s: they were mostly the preserve of large institutions or companies. Importing home computer... only expensive, ... to a law that ... importing indiv... than 50 Deutsc... cost over 1,00... if someone in ... home comput... and no way to ... to smuggling.

'Those folk ... economically ... free at that ...

» The story of the Yugoslavian open-source Galaksija computer is fascinating.

Curious Video Game Machines

Lewis Packwood tells all about his new book

» Lewis proudly poses with a finished copy of his new book.

It's always nice to see a regular Retro Gamer contributor taking a deep dive into a subject they're passionate about, and Lewis Packwood has done just that with his new book *Curious Video Game Machines*. We caught up with him to find out what went into making the book, and what we can expect within.

What draws you to obscure and unusual games machines?

I think it's really interesting, seeing an alternative history of videogames because we've had so many books about Atari, Sega, Nintendo – the kind of mainstream history – and there's all of this other history that never gets talked about. So I wanted to explore that because sometimes, I think failure is more interesting than success.

Sometimes it's not because of a bad product, it's just the wrong time or just other circumstances that don't work out for whatever reason. Things like Virtuality, which was years ahead of its time and worked very well for the time, but was just too expensive and couldn't really cut it in the market.

How did the book deal come to be?

It was remarkably smooth. I was surprised, I anticipated spending a long time pitching this idea to publishers, but actually the first one went for it straight away. So it was remarkably easy in the end. I was prepared for a long battle, but it didn't happen.

The book covers consoles, computers and arcade games – it seems pretty much any hardware is fair game. Why did you choose that broad approach?

I didn't want to limit myself by saying something wouldn't be going in the book, because one of the first ideas I had was to do something on the Avatar machine, which is the final chapter in the book and isn't really a videogame machine at all in the strict sense. It's a suit that you put on where you can view yourself in third person, as if you're in a videogame. It was created as an art project by a guy called Marc Owens and only a few were made, I think he did sell a few, but it was quite a remarkable weird thing so I spoke to him for the book.

Because I wanted to include that, I was like, 'I want to keep this definition as broad as possible.' But basically anything that's odd, I would like to include. At the same time I wanted to be quite narrow in what I covered in the book – rather than do an encyclopedia of every curious games machine I could think of or find, I wanted to do real deep dives on each one.

Roughly how many people have you spoken to for this book?

That's a good question. I'd say dozens. I've spoken to a lot of people and done a lot of research.

» One chapter covers oddball VHS-based gaming machines like the Action Max.

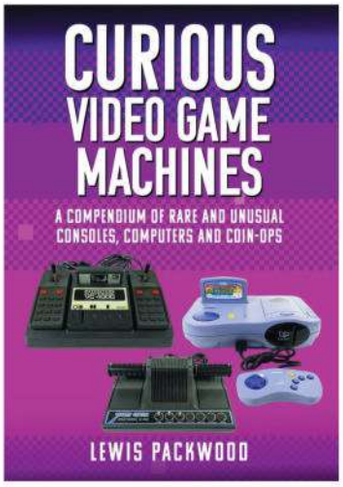
» Lewis also covers hearing aid manufacturer Interton's efforts in the console market.

» Namco's pedal-powered *Prop Cycle* is one of the more successful curiosities covered.

» The Avatar system gives you a new perspective on life – a third-person one.

» What's better, **Retro Gamer** or baked beans? Only the Barcode Battler knows the truth.

It's been quite difficult to track down some of the people, because some of these machines are so obscure that there's hardly any information out there about them. Things like the Daewoo Zemmix, even many collectors have never heard of, because they were never released outside of Korea. So for things like that, it's been really hard to try to track down creators, but I have managed to kind of do a lot of research and find sources in old magazines. In a few cases. I have managed to speak to the creators – I spoke to Richard Holmes, who was one of the founders of Virtuality.



Are there any particular favourite machines or stories you discovered when writing the book?

I'm a big fan of the Galaksija story. It was this Yugoslavian open-source computer created in the early Eighties. At the time there were these really strict import laws, anything more than 50 Deutsche Marks required special permission to import and that meant things like computers. You just couldn't get hold of them. So they came up with this brilliant design for an open-source computer where all of the individual parts could be sourced and combined into this machine. It's pretty basic, but it gave a lot of people their first taste of the computer. I interviewed [Galaksija designer] Voja Antonic for the book. He moved to California a few years ago and he's quite lauded in the coding circles over there. All of his stuff is open source and he keeps coming up with all these brilliant inventions. So he's a real character, a real lovely man. So that was my favourite one.

Do you own any of the machines that you've written about, or have you been inspired to pick them up based on the stories that you've uncovered?

A lot of them are just incredibly hard to get hold of. If I wanted to get hold of a Zemmix, for example, there are collectors I know who still haven't managed to track one down after years. I'm not really a collector, I'm a collector of stories. I prefer finding out about people, so I'm not so much into the owning the machines as just finding out about the stories behind them.

Where can readers buy your book?

You can order it direct from the publisher Pen & Sword, or you can also find it on Amazon, Waterstones, WHSmith, all of those sites. If you're in the US you can order through Case-Mate as well as Amazon.

SECRETMODE The Chinese Room

LITTLE ORPHEUS

JOIN OUR BOLD YET HAPLESS HERO AS HE EXPLORES LOST CIVILIZATIONS, UNDERSEA KINGDOMS, PREHISTORIC JUNGLES AND LANDS BEYOND IMAGINATION.

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

ETERNAL THREADS

A SINGLE-PLAYER, FIRST-PERSON STORY-DRIVEN PUZZLE GAME OF TIME MANIPULATION, CHOICE AND CONSEQUENCE.

OUT NOW COMING SOON TO CONSOLES

SECRETMODE The Chinese Room

DEAR ESTHER

A STUNNINGLY REALISED WORLD, A REMOTE AND DESOLATE ISLAND SOMEWHERE IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES.

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

ZOOL REDIMENSIONED

EXPLORE VIBRANT RETRO LANDSCAPES AND TAKE DOWN MENACING BOSSES IN A MODERN REIMAGINING OF THE CLASSIC PLATFORMING ADVENTURE ZOOL.

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

HER MAJESTY'S SPIFFING

JOIN CAPTAIN FRANK LEE ENGLISH AND HIS TRUSTED COLLEAGUE, ALED, AS THEY TRAVEL THROUGH THE COSMOS IN SEARCH OF PLANETS TO CLAIM FOR A NEW GALACTIC BRITISH EMPIRE!

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

MARS HORIZON 2 THE SEARCH FOR LIFE

LEAD YOUR SPACE AGENCY IN THE SEARCH FOR LIFE IN THIS AUTHENTIC STRATEGY SIMULATION GAME. INVESTIGATE THE SOLAR SYSTEM AND COLLECT EVIDENCE OF LIFE.

COMING SOON

SECRETMODE

WOBBLEDOGS

A 3D PET SIMULATION WHERE YOU RAISE YOUR OWN PERSONAL HIVE OF MUTATING DOGS, PHYSICALLY SIMULATED ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THEIR GUTS!

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

TURBO GOLF RACING

AN ACTION-PACKED FUSION OF RACING AND GOLF. TRAVERSE ACROSS A DIVERSE RANGE OF COURSES, USING YOUR CAR TO SKILLFULLY PUTT YOUR BALL IN THE HOLE.

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

SNAKE PASS

SLITHER, COIL AND CLIMB YOUR WAY TO THE TOP OF HAVEN TOR IN THIS ONE OF A KIND PHYSICS BASED, PUZZLE PLATFORM ADVENTURE.

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

A LITTLE TO THE LEFT

A COZY PUZZLE GAME THAT HAS YOU SORT, STACK, AND ORGANIZE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE

STAMPEDE: RACING ROYALE

AVOID ELIMINATION AND FIGHT YOUR WAY TO THE FRONT OF THE HERD IN THE SCRAMBLE TO BE CROWNED CHAMPION!

COMING SOON

SECRETMODE

LODDLENAUT

PICK UP TRASH, EXPLORE THE VIBRANT WATERS, AND TAKE CARE OF AXOLOTL-LIKE ALIEN CREATURES!

OUT NOW

SECRETMODE The Chinese Room

STILL WAKES THE DEEP

NAVIGATE A COLLAPSING OIL RIG TO SAVE YOUR CREW FROM AN OTHERWORLDLY HORROR ON THE EDGE OF ALL LOGIC AND REALITY.

COMING SOON

SECRETMODE

PARCEL CORPS

RIDE ALONG WALLS, GRIND RAILS, AND STARTLE PIGEONS ON YOUR WAY TO CORPORATION-TOPPLING DOMINATION.

COMING SOON

SECRETMODE

MAKE WAY

SPEED AROUND LOOPS, DRIFT AROUND HELTER SKELTERS, AND UNLEASH WACKY WEAPONRY IN THIS MODERN TAKE ON CLASSIC TOP-DOWN MULTIPLAYER RACING GAMES.

COMING SOON

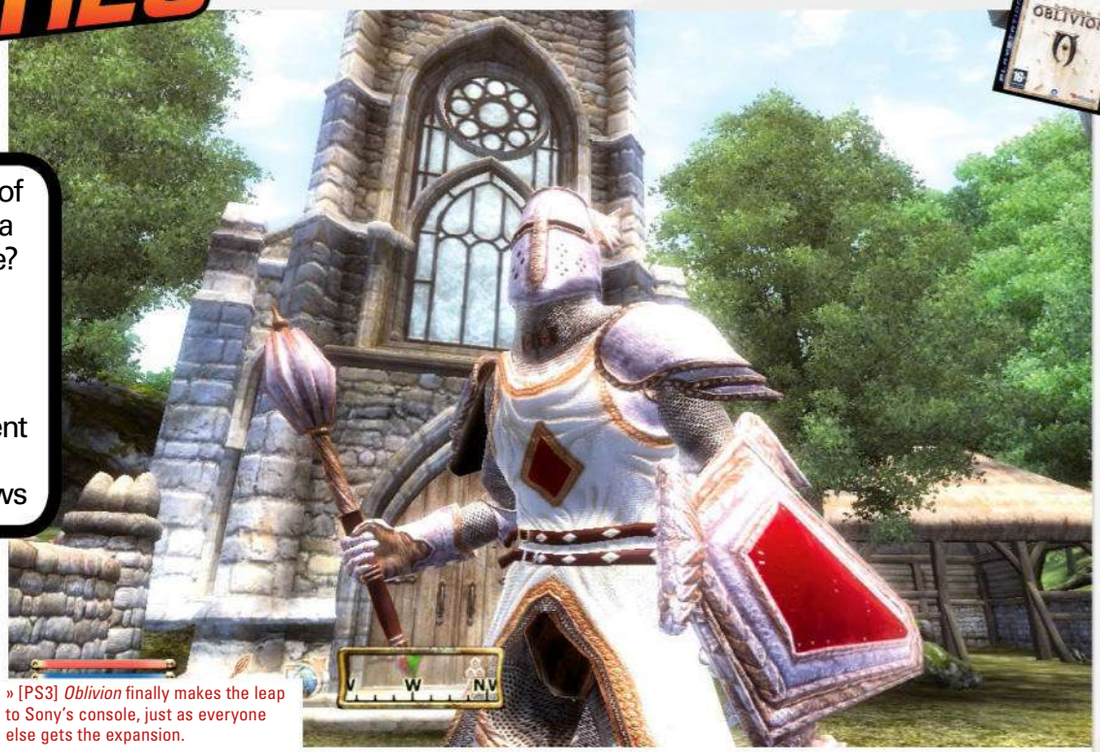
We publish video games.
Our goal is to delight and inspire you.

www.wearesecretmode.com
@wearesecretmode
#wearesecretmode

SECRET MODE

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

MAY 2007 – Has the arrival of the new machines inspired a new golden age of software? Of course not, it's slump season – but Oblivion is still good. Time traveller Nick Thorpe takes a break from reliving his student days to bring you yesterday's latest news



» [PS3] *Oblivion* finally makes the leap to Sony's console, just as everyone else gets the expansion.

NEWS MAY 2007

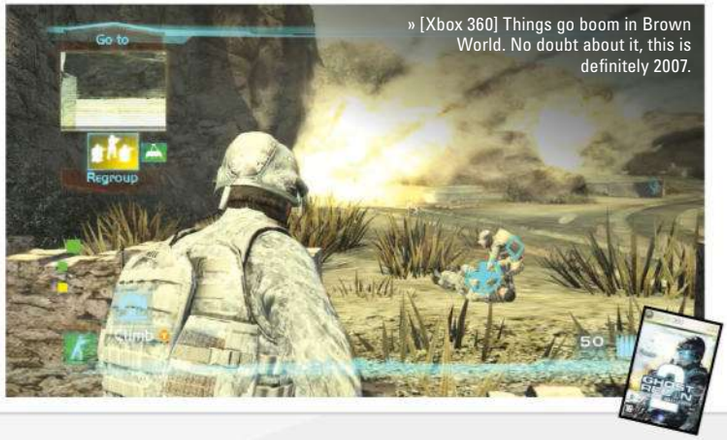
On 3 May, three-year-old Madeleine McCann went missing from a holiday resort in Praia da Luz, Portugal. Madeleine's parents had left their three children asleep while dining in a restaurant, and discovered that their daughter was missing after checking in on them. Though the case has attracted media coverage over many years, Madeleine has never been found and investigations continue to this day.

In political news, Nicolas Sarkozy of the centre-right UMP was elected President Of France on 6 May, succeeding the party's founder and incumbent President Jacques Chirac. He officially assumed the role ten days later. Alex Salmond became the first Scottish National Party politician to serve as Scotland's First Minister on 16 May, leading an administration with the Greens.

Manchester United won the Premier League for the ninth time on 6 May, after Chelsea dropped points in a 1-1 draw at Arsenal. This victory ended what was then the Red Devils' longest Premiership title drought after four years. On 19 May, Chelsea exacted some revenge by beating Manchester United 1-0 to win the FA Cup in the first match played at the new Wembley Stadium.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2007

Reports emerging from the Game Developers Conference reveal some interesting commentary. *Edge* noted that the Wii meant Shigeru Miyamoto was finally seeing movement on the 'Wifeometer' – "his way of judging how much non-gamers care about his games", the magazine explained. Indie game advocate and *Spore* developer Chris Hecker was less kind, with *games™* reporting him saying, "The Wii is a piece of shit. I have uncovered the secret to Wii manufacturing… you take two GameCubes and some duct tape." Both magazines saw the impact of Sony's major showings, the platform game construction kit *LittleBigPlanet* and virtual social space PlayStation Home, with *games™* claiming that they "eclipsed anything its rivals had to offer", though *Edge* felt that "the developer audience was not bowled over by [Home], perhaps already foreseeing being pestered by marketing departments keen to take advantage of the fully physics-modelled, interactive 3D display space Home offers".



» [Xbox 360] Things go boom in Brown World. No doubt about it, this is definitely 2007.

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion enjoyed a resurgence this month, thanks in part to the launch of a PS3 port that scored 10/10 in *Official PlayStation Magazine* and 91% in *Play*. Elsewhere, the new expansion *The Shivering Isles* scored 75% in *PC Gamer*, 9/10 in *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, 8/10 in *X-360* and 4/5 in *360*. *OXM* liked the originality, praising Bethesda for its "definite effort to remove all the familiar items and layouts from the exterior world". *PC Gamer* felt that while the "meaty" quest was "worth bashing through", the expansion's value "comes down to your appetite for *Oblivion*'s combat".

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 led the charge on Xbox 360 this month, earning 4/5 from *360*, 8/10 from

X-360, 8/10 from *games™* and 7/10 from *Edge*. *360* felt that the tactical shooter offered "a surprising lack of challenge" but was "a worthy (if admittedly easy) successor to one of last year's best games". Comparisons to the original were mixed – *Edge* felt that the sequel was "just the exact game *Advanced Warfighter* should have been and would have been if the clock wasn't watching", while *games™* felt that "at a push, it may even be the better game".

Silent Hunter 4: Wolves Of The Pacific was *PC Gamer*'s top scorer this month, with the "atmospheric" and "gorgeous at times" submarine sim earning 87%. *Edge* wasn't quite as happy with it, noting that the game offers an "enormous" amount of control and "a wonderful sense of history" but "can be fearsomely complicated" and had a variety of bugs, settling on a score of 7/10.

Nintendo Wii owners didn't get anything of note this month but DS players could enjoy *Theme Park DS*, which earned 8.5/10 in *nRevolution*, 83% in *Official Nintendo Magazine* and 6/10 in *Edge*. *Edge*'s primary criticism was that the game was "too cautious", whereas the other two magazines praised its faithfulness to the original. More divisive was *Diddy Kong Racing DS* – *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave it 80%, declaring that it was "pretty close to being great but, annoyingly, it's not nearly close enough" because "ditching some fun ideas to make room for the new DS-specific content actually drags the whole thing down". A 5.1/10 review in *nRevolution* called the touchscreen additions "garbage" and advised readers to buy an N64 and the original game.

Everybody's Tennis was the primary entertainment for PS2 players this month, earning 8/10 scores from both *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* and *OPM*, with the former noting that AI opponents are "ruthless on the court" and that the game was a "credible alternative" to *Virtua Tennis 3*. PSP owners were well served by Sega this month, with a port of the aforementioned *Virtua Tennis 3* earning 88% in *Play* and 7/10 in *OPM*, while *After Burner: Black Falcon* scored 82% in *Play*, 7/10 in *games™* and 6/10 in *Edge*. *Play* feeling that *After Burner* "still feels fresh and thrilling", despite "arcade gameplay that's barely changed at all", while *Edge* felt that "you're essentially flying the same mission over and over again".

» [Dreamcast] The bizarre title *Sex Pervert Of A Silence* is used for one of this game's tunes. Seriously.

Speaking of Sega, *Edge* also reviewed the latest Dreamcast import release, *Karous*. Though the magazine doubted that it would truly be the final Dreamcast game – which it did turn out to be – it felt Milestone's shoot-'em-up was "a fair swan song for the machine famous for cel-shaded beauty, niche appeal and passionate, inventive ideas" awarding it 6/10.

What's in store for the first summer of the HD era? Join us again next month to find out.

» [PlayStation 2] While *Everybody's Golf* is a long runner, its tennis sibling isn't as prolific.

» [PC] Not much to see here, but there's a lot going on under the surface.

CHARTS

MAY 2007

XBOX 360

1 – **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2** (Ubisoft)
2 – **Brian Lara International Cricket 2007** (Codemasters)
3 – **Crackdown** (Microsoft)
4 – **Virtua Tennis 3** (Sega)
5 – **Def Jam: Icon** (EA)

WII

1 – **Sonic And The Secret Rings** (Sega)
2 – **Wii Play** (Nintendo)
3 – **WarioWare: Smooth Moves** (Nintendo)
4 – **The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess** (Nintendo)
5 – **Excite Truck** (Nintendo)

PC

1 – **The Sims 2: Seasons** (EA)
2 – **Football Manager 2007** (Sega)
3 – **World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade** (Vivendi)
4 – **Supreme Commander** (THQ)
5 – **FIFA 07** (EA)

MUSIC

1 – **Baby's Coming Back/ Transylvania** (McFly)
2 – **Beautiful Liar** (Beyonce & Shakira)
3 – **Don't Matter** (Akon)
4 – **Cupid's Chokehold** (Gym Class Heroes)
5 – **Flying The Flag (For You)** (Scooch)

THIS MONTH IN...

PC Gamer

"History will always remember Sega's last massively successful console as playing second fiddle to the SNES, but it still has moments well worth revisiting that aren't *Sonic The Hedgehog*." Calling it down the middle, then?

Play

"*Assassin's Creed*, we're hoping, will have an impact. It will show – not just the industry but the world – that videogames have a right to be judged in the same manner as film or TV." A bold prediction, that one.

Official Nintendo Magazine

"You may think it's great that we're jetting off around the world to play all the latest games but it actually means there's never anyone here to write the mag." How did they ever cope?

Agent X II: The Mad Prof's Back!

IT TICKS ALL MY BOXES

» RETROREVIVAL

» AMSTRAD CPC » 1987 » MASTERTRONIC

I received an Amstrad CPC 464 for my 14th birthday and I absolutely loved it. For some reason it came with two of the special Amsoft bundles so I had a significant amount of games to enjoy (although the less said about *Bridge It* the better).

It was a good job that I had so many games, because there wasn't a lot of cash flowing in the Jones house in the late-Eighties, so I often relied on borrowing games from friends or getting cash from relatives so I could enjoy new releases.

It also meant that I put a considerable amount of thought into new purchases and would normally seek out titles that were arcade conversions or had an arcade theme. One of those games was *Agent X II: The Mad Prof's Back!*, a sequel to a budget game that I'd never played. Still, it had a good review in *Amstrad Action*, so I trusted it would be a solid investment.

It was and it pretty much covered all the bases that I looked for in a game. The first stage is a fun if rather straightforward shmup that sees you infiltrating an enemy base. Once you've made it inside, the gameplay takes on the form of a frantic platformer where you have to run around and retrieve access codes so you can progress to the final stage. The last level is a ridiculously challenging take on *Breakout* where the ball moves far too fast and you have to take out the Mad Professor before your energy runs out.

Even though *Agent X II* could be a tough game, I still played it a lot because it ticked all the boxes I looked for in a game, particularly when it cost under £3. Revisiting it today highlights that it hasn't aged as gracefully as I have, but I still have fond memories of the game and I certainly got my money's worth out of it in 1987.

Don't Wake Me: 25 Years of The Dreamcast

A quarter of a century after Sega risked it all to make one last console, we speak to those who lived the dream to explain why the Dreamcast remains revered today – and why some players refuse to leave their slumber

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

LUKE BENSTEAD
Dreampi, Simulant Engine

MARTYN CHUDLEY
Ex-Bizarre Creations

DANIEL CROCKER
WAVE Game Studios

DEREK PASCARELLA
Dreamcast game modder

MIKE TUCKER
Bitmap Bureau

JAMES TOCCHIO
GGDreamcast

JÖRG TITTEL
RapidEyeMovers

Photo credit: Simon Webb

It's July of 1998, and a young boy walks into a newsagent. "I do remember a particular article which was in *Edge*, it was that famous one that says, 'Sega Is Dead, Long Live Dreamcast,'" recalls Daniel Crocker, cofounder of WAVE Game Studios. "I remember it was a real head scratcher as to what that meant at the time, as a ten-year-old kid." Fast forward to September 1999, and Sega is claiming that its new console was responsible for "the biggest 24 hours in entertainment retail history" after a record North American launch day in which it generated $98.4 million in sales. Fast forward a little over a year to February 2001, and another *Edge* headline follows a bombshell announcement. "Dreamcast: finished. Sega: unstoppable." To put it lightly, Dreamcast fans had endured a real roller-coaster ride during its short commercial life. Fast forward just one more time and it becomes clear that some never chose to get off – as we celebrate the Dreamcast's 25th anniversary, Daniel's company has published nine Dreamcast games.

The Dreamcast's eventful lifespan is reflective of the tumultuous circumstances in which the system was conceived. Despite having achieved massive success with the Mega Drive, the mid-Nineties were rough for Sega – its misadventures with the Mega-CD and 32X add-ons had engendered mistrust within its customer base, and the expensive Saturn didn't experience anything like the success of its predecessor. A disastrous early launch had alienated both retailers and publishers, while developers found the console difficult to work with due to its technical complexity. In 1997, a planned merger with Bandai was humiliatingly called off and 3Dfx sued Sega for $105 million. The *Edge* headline Daniel mentioned referred to a plan to leave the Sega brand off the Dreamcast – a plan that was eventually abandoned, but one that isn't entirely ridiculous given these circumstances.

Sega was keen to avoid repeating the mistakes it had made with the Saturn, and created the Dreamcast with a revised hardware strategy that emphasised ease of use. "Dreamcast was ▶

» [Dreamcast] Sonic's return was a big contributor toward the Dreamcast's early success.

» [Dreamcast] Just like it did on the Saturn, *Virtua Fighter* shifted hardware at launch in Japan.

a real power step up from PlayStation and Saturn, and most importantly was developer focussed, removing a lot of the complexity of the previous generation, allowing us to be really creative and not just fight against the hardware," says Martyn Chudley, whose company Bizarre Creations developed *Metropolis Street Racer* for Sega. The console used off-the-shelf parts, with the core components being a single Hitachi SH-4 CPU and NEC Videologic's PowerVR 2 GPU. The 3Dfx Voodoo 2 was considered but ultimately not chosen, resulting in the aforementioned expensive lawsuit. "Microsoft were also on board at the time ('powered by Windows CE') which we were worried about, but we were assured that we would be able to go 'native' to the hardware," Martyn recalls. This functionality was intended to simplify PC ports, and did see use in select games. Sega adopted the NAOMI board, heavily based on the Dreamcast, as its primary arcade hardware to ensure that Dreamcast ports would be relatively easy to create.

The use of DVD-ROM for game discs was considered, but ultimately dismissed due to the expense of the technology. Sega instead used proprietary GD-ROM optical discs, a format developed by Yamaha that offered greater storage than conventional CD-ROMs and couldn't be read by standard drives. The most forward-thinking decision was the support for internet connection out of the box, facilitated by a modular dial-up modem that could be replaced with a high-speed alternative as broadband became more widely adopted. "It was really subsidised by the great and now also late president of Sega [Isao Okawa], who said, 'I'm gonna put millions into this to allow people to experience what's online,'" Jörg Tittel of RapidEyeMovers, then a theatre student freelancing for the *Official Dreamcast Magazine* in the USA tells us. "'I think the future of games is online,' – how right was he?"

> "THE ENTIRE COMPANY JUST LOVED THE SYSTEM – IT WAS POWERFUL AND RELATIVELY EASY TO CODE"
> MARTYN CHUDLEY

» [Dreamcast] *Power Stone* turned heads with chaotic, weapon-filled brawls in 3D arenas.

Sega was also more proactive in seeking to bolster its software line-up, acquiring studios such as sports specialist Visual Concepts and Adeline Software International. Recalling an anecdote about the latter, Jörg reveals Sega's attitude to the creative process. "Frédérick Raynal, who is my dear friend who did *Toy Commander* – when he was invited into Sega's headquarters in London, after his company had been acquired and then renamed to No Cliché, the Japanese president of Sega Europe said hello, and Frédérick asked, 'What would you like me to make now?' And he said, 'You are Frédérick Raynal, right?' He goes, 'Yes.' 'You know how to make games, don't you?' 'Yes.' 'So make one.' And that was literally it, 'Make the game you want to make, but there's only one thing that I'm going to ask you to do, you need to release it on the day of the European Dreamcast release.' That was it."

External developers were sought out too. "Sega approached us via their producer Kats Sato, who had found out that we were the developers on *Formula 1*," says Martyn. "I think we were in a good position because of the success and high profile of the *F1* games, and we had good experience with PC development, working with Rendition, 3Dfx etc – but were ultimately console focussed, which a lot of the signed-up developers weren't." Martyn's memories of Sega's attitude toward the console's key feature also suggests a desire to leave artists to their art. "I don't remember Sega pushing us too hard for the online aspects, but it was definitely something that we wanted ourselves – the concept of being able to 'compete' with people around the world was amazing," Martyn replies. "We didn't have the capability of multiplayer head-to-head, but instead utilised the leaderboard aspects of the system to share not only times and scores, but also up and download ghosts and recordings to compete against, something I'm sure was quite unique at the time."

In many ways, the developer-friendly approach worked. "We definitely made a decision to run with the Dreamcast for *Fur Fighters* (then *Furballs*) because the entire company just loved the system – it was powerful, relatively easy to code, and sharing the tools and technology across the entire company made perfect sense. And the Sega guys were all real gamers, not suits," says Martyn. However, while most major third parties chose to work with Sega, a couple of notable exceptions didn't. Squaresoft was no surprise, having never previously published on Sega consoles, but the thumbs down from former ally Electronic Arts hurt. Former EA vice president Bing Gordon claimed in an interview with *Game Developer* that the decision was driven by Sega's inability to offer similar royalty terms as in the past, as well as its decision not to go with 3Dfx – a decision Martyn also says was "something we were a little disappointed with". The late Bernie Stolar, former Sega Of America president, claimed in the same feature that EA wanted to be the exclusive supplier of Dreamcast sports games – something Sega couldn't accept, having spent $10 million to acquire sports specialist studio Visual Concepts.

Bizarrely, the Dreamcast's Visual Memory Unit was released on 30 July 1998 in Japan.

MASTER OF THE ARENA

Paolo Pisani recalls life on the Dreamarena community team

How did you get started on Dreamarena?
I joined the Dreamarena admin team in early 2000. We were one of the teams at Egomaniacs.net, part of Affinity Internet Holdings, who had a contract with Sega Europe to run the Dreamarena user-generated content, mainly the European message boards. I came to the job sideways really, through language skills. Since Dreamarena was available across most of Western Europe (officially in five languages across 11 countries), nearly everyone working on the team was multilingual. I saw an ad looking for people with multiple languages and familiar with videogames, so I moved to London for the job.

What were your duties?
Officially we were community moderators, and eventually I became community moderator team leader. This was relatively early in the history of online communities, so it felt somewhat like a new frontier. Sega Europe expected us to cover all the languages for 12 hours a day, read everything posted, monitor for harassment and illegal content, keep the community engaged, answer any customer care questions, and provide a basic level of support.

Moderation of online content has evolved significantly since then, with a lot of user-based self-moderation, but back then people were literally paying to access Dreamarena, since you had to tie-up your phone line and pay for the call to your ISP to get online. You used the Sega DreamKey browser to get online, you used the message boards provided by Sega, and spoke only to other Dreamcast users. And there was no way to screen for user age!

How big was the team, and how did that change over time?
At its peak there were seven of us plus the team manager, who didn't do day-to-day moderation duties. We usually spent two weeks on morning shifts and two weeks on afternoon shifts, with occasional weekend shifts. With most of us being trilingual, we could keep some basic cover going with just a couple of people on at the weekends. For the last six months of 2001, once the contract was ended, three of us were taken in-house by Sega Europe, and worked out of the Gunnersbury offices, but as is obvious in retrospect, things were being wound down.

What was the work like?
Moderating Dreamarena was surprisingly intense. There were thousands of users across many countries, and most of them were not internet natives as we would think of them now, so we had an unusual number of gamers' mothers signing on for someone to chat to, for example. We had some disruptive behaviours to deal with (lots of deleting swear words… I can recognise swears in seven languages!), but there were relationships and affairs between users, people that had run up phone bills worth thousands of pounds that they couldn't pay, users obsessed with some of the female admins, and on one crazy night a user who had to be reported to the police for attempting to break down the door of another user to start a fight.

What was the mood like when Sega announced its withdrawal from the console market?
When Egomaniacs lost the contract to moderate Dreamarena it didn't seem that big a deal to us. The Dreamcast was still selling, the PS2 hadn't destroyed the competition yet, and not everyone in the team were gamers, so for them it was just time to look for new jobs. But when they shut down the whole team at the end of 2001, that was different.

I remember that it was November 2001, and the manager of the whole Dreamarena team for Europe met with a group of Japanese executives for half a day. In the afternoon, every single person working on the team was called in to his office one by one, to be told that the department was being disbanded and we were being let go once we worked our notices. To the best of my knowledge, the only ones being kept on past Christmas were the chap who handled sales/online purchases and the manager himself.

It was a bit of an abrupt ending, but gaming never provided particularly good job security. Everyone assumed that Sega would eventually launch a new console, and we were pretty wrong about that.

Dreamarena
SUCHEN IM INTERNET MIT EXCITE
GO
CHU-CHU IS HERE PLAY IT ONLINE NOW!!
TOP TIPS FROM OUR SUPER DREAMERS
YOU SUNK MY BATTLE SHIP!

» [Dreamcast] Dreamarena was redesigned after a while, ditching the blue and orange theme.

» [Dreamcast] Paolo and his colleagues were primarily tasked with managing message boards and chat rooms.

» [Dreamcast] If you're wondering, yes, that is the barber from the Dreamcast TV adverts.

» [Dreamcast] *Sega Bass Fishing* is one of those games that's more fun in practice than on paper.

» [Dreamcast] The Dreamcast benefitted greatly from near-identical conversions of NAOMI arcade

▶ The memory card doubled as a standalone pocket gaming device akin to the popular Tamagotchi and Digimon units, and came loaded with a *Godzilla* game. The console proper arrived in Japan on 27 November 1998. Key games including *Sonic Adventure* and *Sega Rally 2* missed launch day, and problems with GPU manufacturing meant that the launch was blighted by stock shortages, but the stock that was available sold briskly due to the popularity of *Virtua Fighter 3tb*. Sega missed its hardware sales target of a million units by 31 March 1999, selling 900,000, and cut the price of the console from ¥29,800 to ¥19,900 in June 1999, prompting a temporary sales spike.

> "EGM SAID 9-9-99 WAS GONNA BE THE BIGGEST DAY IN ENTERTAINMENT HISTORY. IF A MAGAZINE SAYS THAT, IT TENDS TO GET YOUR ATTENTION"
> **JAMES TOCCHIO**

North America was much better prepared – despite the sacking of Bernie Stolar as Sega Of America's president just prior to launch, with Peter Moore replacing him. The excitement was tangible ahead of the memorable launch date of 9 September 1999. "For me it seemed like it was going to be the system that was going to do it all for Sega, where it was going to be their comeback," says Jörg, who had imported a Japanese console. James Tocchio, who writes and creates videos under the name GGDreamcast, was similarly swept up by the occasion. "I still have my *EGM* [*Electronic Gaming Monthly*] which said 9-9-99 was gonna be the biggest day in entertainment history. If a magazine says that, it tends to get your attention." James was initially hesitant about the Dreamcast, but found himself convinced to take a chance by press hype and encouragement from a friend. "I'd saved up some money and my dad was kind enough to kick in the rest, so we got it on launch day. I was super stoked, couldn't have been more happy about it, firing up *Sonic Adventure* for the first time was just a revelation."

Well stocked, supported by a wide range of games and attractively priced at $199, the Dreamcast got off to a flying start in North America, generating record revenues and quickly taking the record for the fastest console to reach a million sales. Though the European launch of the console was delayed from 23 September to 14 October in order to ensure the online infrastructure was ready, the launch was also successful, with Sega Europe's CEO Jean Francois Cecillon claiming that sales in his region were six months ahead of schedule during the Christmas period. Things still weren't quite perfect – the North American launch suffered from a batch of defective GD-

WILDEST DREAMS

The capabilities you never knew your Dreamcast had

ON-DISC SECRETS

■ Every GD-ROM has a regular density section, containing a warning about playing the disc in a stereo. Some games, including *Sonic Adventure*, *Shenmue II*, *Dead Or Alive 2* and *Under Defeat*, also use the space to store bonus goodies such as desktop wallpapers. These can be accessed with a PC.

HANDHELD LINK-UP

■ Owners of the Neo Geo Pocket Color can swap data with the Dreamcast, so long as they have a pair of games that support one another and the required link cable. Games supporting this feature include *Capcom Vs SNK* and *SNK Vs Capcom: Match Of The Millennium*, and *Cool Cool Toon* and *Cool Cool Jam*.

ARCADE DATA EXCHANGE

■ Though mainly spotted in Japan, some NAOMI arcade games had VMU slots, allowing for interaction with their home ports. Notable examples include *F355 Challenge*, *Virtual On: Oratorio Tangram*, *Power Stone 2* and *Street Fighter Zero 3 Upper*. It's a highly useful feature as you could make progress wherever you were.

CROSS-PLATFORM MULTIPLAYER

■ It was possible for Dreamcast and PC players to face off against each other online in *Quake III Arena* back in 2000, and they can do the same in *Driving Strikers* today. More surprisingly, Capcom built cross-platform play into *Capcom Vs SNK 2*, allowing for fights between Dreamcast and PS2 owners.

» [Dreamcast] Even with added content, some gamers felt games like *Crazy Taxi* were lightweight.

ROMs, while the demand for online services overwhelmed European servers. These were minor problems compared to Sega Ozisoft's disastrous launch in Australia and New Zealand, where first-party games and key peripherals like VMUs were unavailable at launch due to customs issues and low stock allocations.

Those who bought in were richly rewarded with phenomenal games. "*Sega Rally 2* felt like a rushed port, but I still put hundreds of hours into it. *The House Of The Dead 2* was almost arcade perfect though and felt like the console's 'killer app' at the time," remembers Mike Tucker of Bitmap Bureau, the team behind *Xeno Crisis*. "*Soulcalibur* is another excellent title which Namco really put a great deal of care into, and it was pleasing to see a number of 2D fighters make their way to the system too, particularly *Street Fighter Alpha 3* and *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*," he adds. For James, multiplayer games were a huge part of the console's appeal. "We had games like *Power Stone*, which was incredible, and *Power Stone 2*. Even more relatively simple games like *Chu Chu Rocket* – it's the quintessential gaming moment where you and all your little friends are screaming and laughing, and just having a great time."

More unconventional games were also a staple of the Dreamcast experience. Jörg holds a special fondness for *Toy Commander*. "Honestly, I think it's one of the greatest games ever made," he explains. "It's so much fun to fly around this massive house and the missions are crazy and it's so inventive, but it's pure imagination. You feel like a child but you're challenged as an adult." Vivarium scored a hit in Japan with *Seaman*, a game in which you raised a man-faced fish that you could talk to via a microphone add-on, while *Roommania #203* gave players the chance to observe and semi-actively direct a man going about his daily life. Dedicated fishing rod and maraca peripherals greatly enhanced *Sega Bass Fishing* and *Samba De Amigo* respectively, while *Jet Set Radio*'s concept of a graffiti turf war between gangs on rollerblades was just as unique as the enormously influential cel-shading technique behind its art style.

» [Dreamcast] This obscure typing game brought Derek into the world of fan translations.

BORDERS DOWN

Derek Pascarella on the fan translations that bring new audiences to Japanese games

How did you get involved with fan translations?
It was actually the result of the highly popular, never contentious COVID lockdowns where I was at home a lot more often than I had been before, for better or worse. There was one title in particular, one of the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* typing games, that for some reason I just loved. You can only play the first three levels in English, so back then I couldn't enjoy the rest of the game. That was the first one I decided I just wanted to look at.

I always appreciated fan translations even before trying to do that. The *Policenauts* translation on Saturn and PlayStation, for example – *Policenauts* is my favourite game of all time and it never would be the case if it weren't for people developing that translation patch.

What motivates you to choose a particular game?
I suppose it probably varies for different translation patch developers out there. It's a combination of factors though, and I think this is probably a pretty universal answer. It's feasibility. Can it be done with my current skill set? Is it a game that I will care enough about to actually put untold dozens, or usually more like hundreds or thousands of hours into, over the course of the next year or more?

How many people do you typically work with?
It varies, sometimes it's as few as just me and a translator. In the case of *Nakoruru*, there were two translators – one that did an initial pass, and another one who did a much more refined version only because he's a professional translator. Then I had actually Lewis [Cox] from the Dreamcast Junkyard, he did the editing on that game. I did all of the hacking, all of the graphics. Somebody did the custom logo for me because I'm not really good with logos, but everything else was my work outside of all the language stuff. But usually it's a small team.

Apart from the *Evangelion* typing game, do any of your other translations particularly stick out as passion projects?
Yeah, the *Nakoruru* visual novel. I'm a big fan of the visual novel genre and, mainly because there was zero Western appetite for the genre back then, there was never a single one localised on the Dreamcast. I chose Nakoruru because of the cool tie-in to *Samurai Shodown*, and the artwork, the music – it just seems like such a beautiful heartfelt game. That was two years of work, and two years of pretty constant work too. I put my blood, sweat and tears into that, it was where it was of one of the last things I thought about when I put my head down on my pillow at night, and one of the first things I thought about when I opened my eyes in the morning. There was a lot of work, but it was so worth it and I'm tremendously proud of it, and that also goes for the people who helped me make it a reality. It wasn't all me.

» [Dreamcast] The rising international popularity of visual novels makes *Nakoruru*'s translation particularly timely.

IT'S STILL THINKING

Essential games from the Dreamcast's indie library

WIND AND WATER PUZZLE BATTLES • 2008

The Dreamcast is as capable with low-resolution 2D graphics as it is with silky smooth 3D, and the beautiful pixel art in Yuan Works' puzzle game demonstrates that excellently. Despite being the oldest game on this list, copies of *Wind And Water: Puzzle Battles* are still readily available to buy today.

STURMWIND • 2013

It takes something special for a shoot-'em-up to stand out on the Dreamcast, but this one by Duranik has rightly achieved legendary status among fans. It plays very well and its production values set a new standard for indie games at the time, with stunning graphics that rival many officially licensed releases.

XENO CRISIS • 2020

Bitmap Bureau's overhead shooter was developed for Sega's own Mega Drive and is great on any console. However, the Dreamcast version is cheaper than the cartridge releases and the system feels like a good fit for the game, as the default controller works well and the twin-stick support is greatly appreciated.

» [Dreamcast] How do you even categorise *Seaman* in a genre? Virtual pet meets talk-'em-up?

» [Dreamcast] With creative freedom, French studio No Cliché explored the creativity of kids.

» [Dreamcast] The ambition of *Shenmue* was matched in size only by its extravagant budget.

As great as many of the games were, the Dreamcast software library wasn't beyond criticism. "It felt like Sega hadn't really learned anything from the 32-bit era," says Mike. "The arcade scene was slowly dying out, and whilst Sega continued to produce some incredible arcade titles and conversions, the PlayStation showed that consumers were ready for something more substantial – titles such as *Metal Gear Solid*, *Resident Evil*, *Final Fantasy VII*, *Ace Combat*, etc. Ultimately there just weren't enough excellent games for the system from third parties." Support varied – Capcom supplied an exclusive *Resident Evil* in the form of *Code: Veronica* and was fairly prolific, but Namco's support for the console was highly limited after *Soulcalibur*. Konami canned its exclusive *Castlevania* and ended up supplying Sega with the likes of *The Grinch* and *Nightmare Creatures II*, rather than *Metal Gear Solid* and *Silent Hill*. The *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K* series from Visual Concepts gave American sports fans polished alternatives to EA's sports fare, but football fans really missed the presence of *FIFA* – and *International Superstar Soccer*, for that matter.

The prevailing feeling within Sega appeared to be that imitating the games that were popular elsewhere wasn't going to draw customers away from competing systems – progress would come from getting creative and finding the next big hit of its own. "Innovation is essential when you are in crisis – it is the only way to survive," Sega Rosso head Kenji Sasaki said in the October 2000 issue of *Edge*. In the same

INTREPID IZZY • 2021

Senile Team is hugely important to the Dreamcast indie scene, and its recent release shows exactly why. The console had previously lacked Metroidvania platformers and *Intrepid Izzy* does the style well, with smoothly animated high-resolution 2D graphics and speed parity in 50Hz and 60Hz modes.

DRIVING STRIKERS • 2023

Alternative sports games are always welcome, but what makes this *Rocket League*-style outing particularly notable is that it's the first indie Dreamcast game to support online play, with cross-play against PC players to boot. A demo is available – if you like it, get online and we'll see you on the pitch.

issue, Sonic Team's Yuji Naka expressed a desire to "keep my heart open to new ideas and keep my company as innovative as it has been", and Toshihiro Nagoshi of Amusement Vision said he would "rather not make sequels". Hisao Oguchi of Hitmaker even went so far as to say that "sequels would be a good move from a business perspective", but that the team's "strong feeling" was "we really want to make something new and innovative each time". That approach resulted in great original games, but also meant the absence of many past Sega hits. If you expected to see new versions of Saturn favourites like *Panzer Dragoon*, *NiGHTS* and *Burning Rangers* or more established series like *Shinobi* and *Shining Force*, you were out of luck.

Still, in the latter half of 2000 it felt like things were coming together. For a start, lengthier single-player games had started to appear. *Skies Of Arcadia* and *Grandia II* emerged as top-class options for RPG fans in Japan, providing a tantalising glimpse of what awaited the rest of the world in 2001. The *Gran Turismo*-alike *Sega GT* made its way outside of Japan, while *Metropolis Street Racer* finally arrived with the innovative Kudos system that emphasised stylish driving. There was also the small matter of a certain high-budget epic from Yu Suzuki's AM2. "*Shenmue* totally changed the way that I thought of videogames – the storytelling, the freedom, the scope, the intimacy of the environments," says James. "It was just unlike anything we had ever seen. It wasn't a shooting game, it wasn't a racing game – it was sort of a life simulator, and it was the first time I'd ever experienced anything like that."

The system's online capabilities also started to reveal their potential, after a very slow start. *NBA 2K1* and *NFL 2K1* both offered very solid online play across the pond. A port of the popular PC hit *Quake III: Arena* was the flagship game in North America and Europe, while Japanese players were just settling in with the Dreamcast's biggest online hit. "Games like *Phantasy Star Online* were just absolutely mind-blowing, where for the first time we had online games that we were seeing in the PC space like *Diablo*," says James about the ambitious release. "It was basically Sonic Team's take on PC online gaming, but you could do with it what I thought was greater accessibility." The game created lasting international friendships between adventurers, but was also responsible for more than a few sickies and some enormous phone bills. "I was teetering on the edge of losing my life to it so I quit, but it was incredible," Jörg confesses.

With PlayStation 2's international arrival imminent and Christmas looming, the Dreamcast received favourable comparisons to Sony's console from the specialist press. *CVG* declared, "Dreamcast is the machine of choice for players who want innovative and original games" and that the "games are more exciting and the online features are getting interesting". However, *Digitiser*'s resident opinionated pig Fat Sow noted that these efforts weren't gaining wider recognition, observing that, "The quality of Dreamcast games coming out simply borders on the silly. And yet, all the media can hark on about is the PlayStation 2." A

"IT WAS REALLY EASY TO WORK WITH THANKS TO THE AMAZING TOOLS PRODUCED BY THE DREAMCAST HOMEBREW SCENE"
MIKE TUCKER

» [Dreamcast] Getting *Resident Evil – Code: Veronica* as an exclusive was a huge coup for Sega.

» [Dreamcast] Not having *Madden* wasn't a problem, given how good *NFL 2K* was.

Development Dynamo

With the DreamPi, Simulant Engine and Driving Strikers to his name, Luke Benstead is a towering figure in the Dreamcast scene

The DreamPi is a huge factor in the popularity of online Dreamcast games today. How did it come about?

One day I was Googling stuff, and I came across people still playing the Dreamcast online and there was the DC-PC service thing that you could set up. Every few months I'd remember it and then I ordered a modem, and it's sat in my drawer. Then the Raspberry Pi came out, I first got one because everyone got one, right? I was like, "What can I use this for? This would be perfect for that DC-PC thing." Then in 2015 I was on paternity leave, and whilst the baby was napping – which was not often – I started fiddling with it. That's when I realised that it was a really rubbish experience. You could only play games that had blind dialling and didn't look for a dial tone. You had to enter a command just at the right time when it was dialling to answer. I'm a developer, so I was like, "I'm sure I can do this better."

How about the Simulant Engine?

In 2011, I was coding something, I was trying to reverse engineer a game, and I wrote some code to help me visualise what the different parts of the files were – like whether it was a model or whatever. Then I forgot about the game, because I just started hacking around with code. That was the start of the Simulant Engine. It wasn't called that, it was just called My OpenGL Toolkit. I released a game called *Rocks & Spaceworms* on Android which was an *Asteroids*-type game. I parked the engine to work on DreamPi stuff and then it was later, maybe a couple years after, that somebody said, "We could really use a really nice game engine for the Dreamcast," and I was just like, "Hold on, I've got something." So then I spent years trying to get it to run on the Dreamcast.

What did you do with it then?

There's a guy called David Reichelt, he's one of the only people other than me that's actually used Simulant for anything, and he suggested that we put together a Halloween demo. He's really good at 3D modelling and I think he works in games during the day anyway, and so he put together this amazing level and then I used it as a bug test on Simulant to see if we could get anything running. The memory usage and the speed was a problem, but we did it and then a couple of weeks later David suggested a Christmas demo, which is what *Driving Strikers* was.

How did *Driving Strikers* progress to a full game?

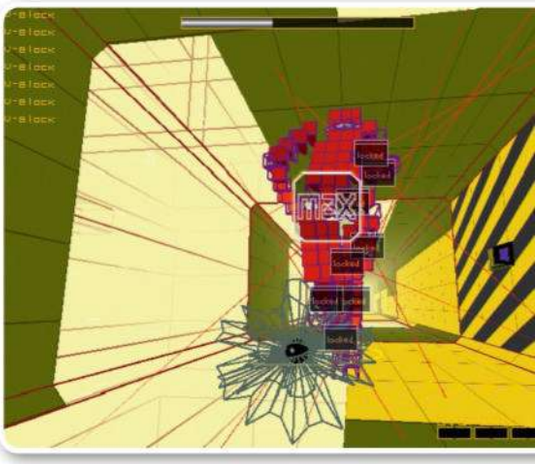
When we released it everyone was like, "Wow, can you make this a full game?" Why not, we're half way there – famous last words! I remember it was early the next year, I was aiming for a May release because we'd done so much in such a short time. To get to an actual release it would just be more levels, tweaking, improvements, UI – stuff like that, but not anything major. But actually somebody said, "Can you make this online?" I didn't say no, so that was a year of development in itself to get it online.

» [Dreamcast] *Driving Strikers* started life as a demo rather than a full online game.

» [Dreamcast] *Tunnels* is the Halloween demo that first showed the power of the Simulant Engine.

» [Dreamcast] *MSR* was a great game, but not a profitable venture for Bizarre Creations.

» [Dreamcast] Jörg worked with Sega to create a VR successor to *Cosmic Smash* in 2023.



» [Dreamcast] *Rez* may be decades old, but its abstract visuals haven't aged a day.

» [Dreamcast] *Soulcalibur* was one of the first home conversions to truly outdo its arcade parent.

» [Dreamcast] Despite marketing slogans, online gaming took many months to arrive on the console.

» [Dreamcast] For a time, Sega's console got the best versions of multiplatform games like *Soul Reaver*.

respectable Christmas wasn't enough – Dreamcast sales had collapsed over the summer, Sega was losing hundreds of millions of dollars and plenty of players were willing to wait for the PS2. After a week of fevered speculation, on 31 January 2001 Sega confirmed that it would cease producing Dreamcast consoles at the end of March, and announced its plans to produce games for the PS2 and Game Boy Advance, as well as the forthcoming GameCube and Xbox.

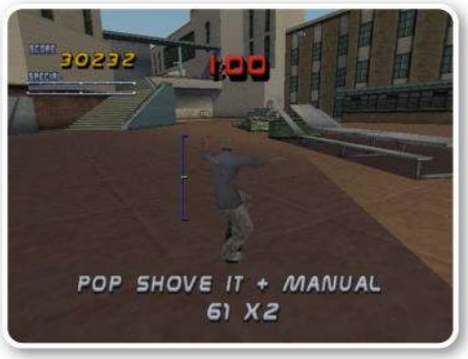
"We were a year late with *MSR*, and strangely felt a little guilty that Dreamcast was ultimately failing. Not just because we thought we had a pretty OK game, but because we were supposed to be one of the launch titles for the machine, and by the time we were released the Dreamcast was already in its death throes," Martyn recalls. The game had been completely rebooted at the studio's own expense after a disastrous showing at E3 1999, and Bizarre Creations was fortunate to avoid being shuttered as a consequence of the console's commercial failure, as Martyn elaborates. "We had sunk a huge amount of company resources into *MSR*, knowing we would ultimately never recoup those losses. We asked Sega, knowing that they were going to ditch hardware, if we could create a Sega version of *MSR* for the PS2, but Sega simply refused to admit that they were abandoning the platform. As we were financially at risk, at this point we approached Microsoft and pitched them a different racing game – essentially Formula 1 on circuits created 'over' cities. We showed them a demo of *MSR* on Dreamcast at which point they said, 'Well, can we have *that*?' And the rest as they say, is history," Martyn concludes, alluding to the highly successful *Project Gotham Racing* series.

> "SEVERAL PEOPLE SAY THAT THE DREAMCAST IS A CURRENT-GEN SYSTEM BECAUSE IT NEVER STOPPED GETTING GAMES, AND I AGREE"
> DANIEL CROCKER

Despite Sega's reassurances that the immediate future was bright, with 100 games still due for release over the coming year, reality set in quickly for Dreamcast owners. Conversions of high-profile games like *Black & White* and *Half-Life* were cancelled, with even Sega itself moving projects like *GunValkyrie* and *ToeJam & Earl III* to other platforms. Though there were genuine highlights, such as *Sonic Adventure 2*, the cult classic horror adventure *Illbleed* and the incredibly stylish *Cosmic Smash*, even the best games were occasionally tempered with disappointment. European gamers got second-class versions of *Daytona USA 2001* and *Unreal Tournament* which lacked online play, and North American gamers missed out on late highlights like *Headhunter*, *Shenmue II* and *Rez* – "a masterpiece which just blew me away on all fronts," says Mike. Official releases in North America and Europe dried up by the spring of 2002, with Dreamarena closing at the end of February and SegaNet following later in the year. Sega's final major first-party development for the system was *Sakura Wars 4*, released in Japan in March 2002.

Of course, the story didn't end there as a limited level of official support for the console continued, albeit in Japan only. Though games like *The King Of Fighters 2002* and *Puyo Puyo Fever* arrived as occasional treats and a multitude of visual novels arrived regularly until mid-2004, it was Treasure's *Ikaruga* that drew the most attention from import gamers and set the tone for the Dreamcast's final years. "The system became somewhat of a home to quirky Japanese shooters such as *Border Down*, *Under Defeat*, *Radirgy* and so on," Mike remembers. *Karous* eventually became the final new game officially published for the console on 8 March 2007, with the official servers for *Phantasy Star Online* also closing at the end of March 2007. The dream had finally come to its official end, though pedants will note that the much sought after *Border Down* was reprinted in January 2008. That's just the official tale, though. "I've heard several people say that the Dreamcast is a current-gen system because it never stopped getting games, and I agree," says Daniel. In the summer of 2000, hackers had managed to exploit its support for the rarely-used MIL-CD format to boot pirated games on unmodified hardware. Sega and its third parties were understandably unhappy, but this engineering flaw helped to secure continued interest from fans as it gave rise to a thriving homebrew scene. Emulators, media players, ports of games like *Doom* and *Quake*, and eventually original games proliferated. Daniel remembers *Beats Of Rage*, a *Streets Of Rage*-style

» [Dreamcast] *Ecco The Dolphin* was a rare returning franchise from Sega's past, and looked amazing.



» [Dreamcast] *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* is great, but doesn't push the Dreamcast particularly hard.

» [Dreamcast] *Silent Scope* was arguably the highest profile game Konami brought to Sega's console.

» [Dreamcast] Fans of 2D fighting games were well catered for thanks to Capcom's support.

engine by Senile Team, as his introduction to the community. "The concept sounded extremely cool, and the fact that it could be used to make your own games really piqued an interest because I had a little bit of a modding background." Cryptic Allusion's *Feet Of Fury*, developed using the free development library KallistiOS, became the first commercially released Dreamcast indie game in the summer of 2003. "At the time it definitely felt like, 'Is this OK?'" recalls Daniel. "But it was a really awesome concept that you could essentially make your own game and run it on a console."

> "THE GAMES WERE MADE BY PEOPLE WHO WERE ALLOWED TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES CREATIVELY, AND YOU CAN FEEL THAT"
> JÖRG TITTEL

In the years that followed, players got to enjoy games like *Rush Rush Rally Racing*, *Pier Solar*, *Dux* and *Alice's Mom's Rescue*, and the Dreamcast indie scene is still thriving today. Bitmap Bureau made its own contribution in 2020 with a port of *Xeno Crisis*, giving Mike insight into the reasons why the console is so popular with indie developers. "It was really easy to work with thanks to the amazing KallistiOS and related SDK tools produced by the Dreamcast homebrew scene," he explains. "It was very straightforward to get to grips with all aspects of the Dreamcast and it was very well documented. Fortunately the GPU still had palette-based rendering features, which made porting *Xeno Crisis* over even simpler. This meant that we could spend a decent amount of time layering in some Dreamcast-specific features such as the VMU support, vibration, twin-stick controller support and so on." Mike is also a fan of the work of others in the scene, including WAVE's releases. "*Xenocider* and *Intrepid Izzy* look particularly fun! The NG:Dev Team titles look very solid too, as does *Sturmwind*," he enthuses. "It's encouraging to see so many developers supporting the system beyond its demise!"

What exactly is it that drives WAVE to be so prolific? Daniel credits the fans. "My original plan was really to put out a few titles and leave it there. I wanted to see if it could be done a little bit more professionally than I'd seen previously, and also if it could be done in modern times," he recalls. "But what started happening is that the community would message other developers and say, 'Hey, can you contact these guys WAVE because they're looking to put out high-quality pressed versions of games.' We've never really gone after anybody. It's always been on the basis that the community wants it, so we give the community what they're asking for."

As Dreamcast games continue due to the enduring demand from fans, their inquest into the console's untimely demise is equally ceaseless. Online commentators are quick to apportion blame, whether that's to the engineers who decided against DVD, the marketing men who chose barbers over gameplay footage, those who whipped up the overwhelming hype for the PS2 or those dastardly pirates. The urge to find a simple answer is understandable, but as always the reality is complex and a multitude of factors were at play. As is so often the case, it ultimately comes down to money. Publishers and the buying public were initially wary of both the Dreamcast and Xbox, the former due to Sega's track record in the console business and the latter because Microsoft was a new entrant in the market. Sega simply didn't have deep enough pockets to find out if it could have regained their trust, whereas Microsoft could afford to buy the time required to earn it, losing billions of dollars to establish a foothold in the console market.

The fact that so many keyboards have been worn down discussing that commercial failure speaks volumes about the allure of the Dreamcast. While there's a prevailing sense of injustice that a console that hosted so many amazing experiences was cut down in its prime, it's likely that it wouldn't be so revered today if it hadn't been. Sega's skilled developers would undoubtedly have made great games if the company's financial situation had been more secure, but think back to that quote from Kenji Sasaki, "Innovation is

» [Dreamcast] *Jet Set Radio*'s graphical style has often been imitated, but very rarely matched.

» [Dreamcast] *Phantasy Star Online*'s approach to cross-language online communication was highly innovative.

essential when you are in crisis – it is the only way to survive." Determined to make a success of the Dreamcast, Sega's teams entered a period of unmatched creativity by following that philosophy. They weren't able to achieve their goal but they ensured that it went out in a blaze of glory, creating plenty of artistic triumphs that stand as the console's enduring legacy.

"I think that's what makes the Dreamcast so special, is that the games were actually really freaking fun," says Jörg. "They were delightful and they were original, and they were made by people who were allowed to express themselves creatively, and you can feel that. This is why they're outlasting all of the crap that has come out since." The Dreamcast Junkyard's ranking of the best games for the console is testament to how well they have stood the test of time – if you look at the top 30, only *Metropolis Street Racer* and *Toy Commander* are true exclusives. All it takes to play *Sonic Adventure*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Ikaruga* or *Shenmue* these days is a quick visit to Steam or the Xbox store. It's easy enough that some would argue that you just don't need a Dreamcast now.

Those of you who were along for the ride will know otherwise. The Dreamcast represents the end of an era – not only Sega's time in the hardware business, but of consoles that prioritised the arcade experience. The creativity of the console's games in turn ignites creative passion within its fans, as so many of our interviewees ably demonstrate, and when games like *Rez Infinite* and Jörg's *Cosmic Smash* successor *C-Smash VRS* fit virtual reality naturally, it's because they carry forward the spirit of innovation and embrace of new technology that defined Dreamcast-era Sega. History may be written by the winners, but the valiant efforts of the defeated go down in legend – and the Dreamcast is a truly legendary console.

Community Connections

Vital online resources for anyone who wants to live the dream

The Dreamcast Junkyard

thedreamcastjunkyard.co.uk

This long-running site is a one-stop shop for all the latest news in the Dreamcast scene, as well as original features, interviews and reviews of new indie games. As well as the main blog, the site produces the DreamPod podcast.

THE DREAMCAST JUNKYARD
25 YEARS OF DREAMCAST
NAOMI Expanding The Dreamcast Collection
TOP TWO HUNDRED
Celebrating 25 Years of Dreamcast... Click Here to see the 2023 Edition!
Celebrating 25 Years of the Dreamcast and the Kaiju Monster it Rode in on

Dreamcast-Talk

dreamcast-talk.com

If you're looking to chat about all aspects of the Dreamcast with like-minded fans, this forum is an active alternative to the usual social media platforms. The site also hosts servers for some of the online Dreamcast games.

Dreamcast Live

dreamcastlive.net

Anyone who wants to get back online with their Dreamcast should pay a visit to this site, which hosts connection guides, essential downloads, archived DLC, leaderboards, a schedule for online games and even giveaways.

Sega Dreamcast Info

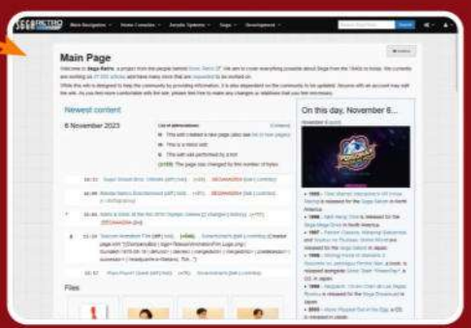
sega-dreamcast-info-games-preservation.com

The URL is unwieldy and the design is basic, but Comby Laurent's site is fascinating for any hardcore Dreamcast fan as it details many prototypes and unreleased games, even including developer interviews for some.

Sega Retro

segaretro.org

This invaluable community-edited wiki is a fantastic resource for information on all things Sega, including the Dreamcast. You'll find everything from credit listings and review scores for games to information on peripherals.



SUBSCRIBE TODAY

AND GET THEC64 MINI WORTH £59.99*

- One of our most popular gifts ever, TheC64 Mini contains an incredible range of features
- Discover a fantastic library of 64 built-in games
- Easy to use – just connect to your HDTV, plug in the joystick and off you go! Gone are the days of loading games slowly from cassette or disk!
- Four save slots for each game
- A host of other features including being able to program in BASIC
- THE NOSTALGIA!

GIFT WORTH £59.99

*INCLUDED WITH EVERY PRINT SUBSCRIPTION

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE NOW AT

www.magazinesdirect.com/RET/XK69

TELEPHONE **0330 333 1113** AND QUOTE **XK69**

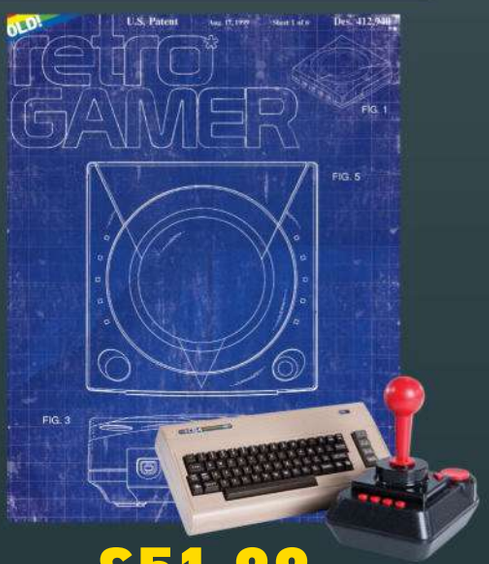
Exclusive **Subscriber Cover** Every Issue!

Great Reasons to subscribe...

- Stunning exclusive subscriber-only covers
- You'll never miss an issue!
- It's delivered direct to your door
- Brilliant value – save money on the cover price

1 PAYMENT. A WHOLE YEAR OF ISSUES DELIVERED STRAIGHT TO YOUR DOOR OR DEVICE. SIMPLE

PRINT



£51.99
Annual Payment

13 Issues of **Retro Gamer** in print over 12 months, saving **25%**

DIGITAL

OLD!
retro GAMER
A TRIBUTE TO CRAFTGOLD
THE MAKING OF SPELLBOUND DIZZY
ATARI 2600+ REVIEW INSIDE
Dreamcast
25 YEARS ON, CELEBRATING THE BELOVED SEGA CONSOLE THAT REFUSES TO DIE

£42.99
Annual Payment

13 issues of **Retro Gamer** in digital over the course of the year, saving **33%**

*(gifts not included with digital subscriptions)

TERMS & CONDITIONS: Offer open to new UK subscribers only. Pricing is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). Your gift will be delivered separately within 60 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. Gift not available with a digital subscription. Gifts only available in the colour Black. The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm UK Time or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.. Offer closes **31/01/2024**.

Peripheral Vision

CX78 Joypad

» **PLATFORM:** Atari 7800 » **YEAR:** 1989 » **COST:** £14.99 (launch), £100+ (today, boxed), £20+ (today, unboxed)

Joysticks had been the primary controllers of choice for Atari consoles ever since the introduction of the 2600 in 1977, but by the late-Eighties competing consoles from Nintendo and Sega had firmly established joypads in the console market, so this two-button joypad was Atari's response. Its design is fairly conventional, although its d-pad is oddly positioned in the top-left corner, and like the Master System's early controllers, it features a screw-hole for a miniature joystick.

The CX78 is intended for use with the Atari 7800, as shown by its two fire buttons, and pairs of them were packed in with consoles in PAL regions. The controller was also packaged with later Atari 2600 systems. As a result, very few were sold individually and boxed examples are extremely difficult to come by today. Compared to the system's standard Pro-Line Joysticks, which are somewhat notorious for their poor ergonomics, the CX78 is preferred by many. However, the joypads are somewhat prone to failure with overzealous use due to their thin PCBs, prompting US Atari retailer Best Electronics to engineer upgrade kits for sale.

ESSENTIAL GAME
COMMANDO

Plenty of Atari 7800 games don't actually use both controller buttons, so we're looking for one that does here. Fortunately, we don't have to look very far for a good one, as this conversion of Capcom's classic run-and-gun fits the bill perfectly – the left fire button is used for firing your regular gun, while the right fire button is used to throw grenades. This is one of the better games on the Atari 7800 and should be much more enjoyable to play with the joypad than the Pro-Line Joystick.

CX78 Joypad fact

■ Despite sharing a connector and features, Atari 7800 and Master System controllers are not compatible with one another due to differing pinouts and adapters which are required for use.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

THE STORY OF

THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR

THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTIES, ADVENTURE GAMES OFFERED FREEDOM, EVOCATIVE DESCRIPTIONS AND ADVENTURES BEYOND OUR WILDEST DREAMS. WHEN THE LATE CODER SEAN ELLIS PROPOSED A SIMPLE-TO-USE UTILITY THAT COMBINED TEXT WITH GRAPHICS, INCENTIVE SOFTWARE JUMPED AT THE CHANCE OF A HIGH-TICKET PRODUCT. WHAT NOW, BRAVE ADVENTURER?

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

» The Graphic Adventure Creator author, Sean Ellis, who sadly died in 2020.

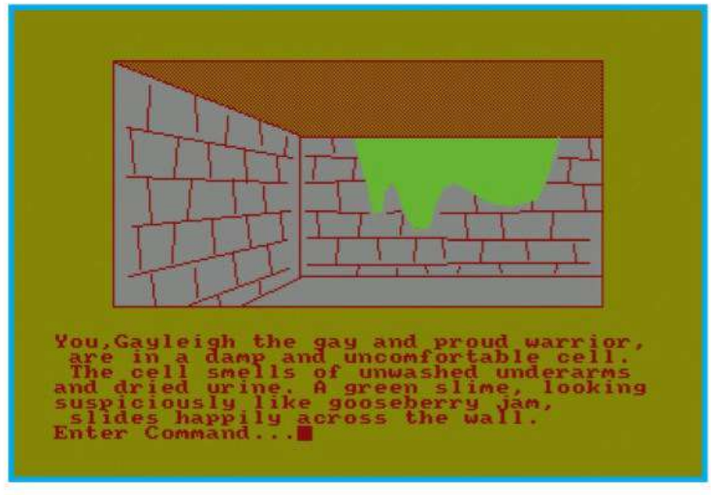
» Incentive's Ian Andrew in 1983. He quickly realised the potential of GAC.

They say everyone has a novel in them – in the mid-Eighties, Hampshire-based Incentive Software believed the same was true of adventure games. In 1985, it launched The Graphic Adventure Creator (GAC), a utility that combined the text creation facility of Gilsoft's popular The Quill and its companion add-on, The Illustrator. Now, fans of the genre could, without any programming experience, create bespoke worlds and adventures, with only their imaginations and artistic skills to limit them.

The Graphic Adventure Creator was the brainchild of Amstrad CPC owner Sean Ellis. Sean's inspiration came from a ZX81 text adventure called *City Of Alzan*, one of several programs in Trevor Toms' *The ZX81 Pocket Book*. Trevor's system introduced Sean to data-driven programming via counters, markers and its base role as an interpreter for a set of command strings. The young programmer soon began working on GAC's predecessor, ADVAL, ADVenture Algorithmic Language, during his first term at university in the autumn of 1984. Unaware of the fast-rising success of The Quill, Sean shortly moved on to developing what would eventually transmogrify into The Graphic Adventure Creator.

ADVAL, was a pain even by its author's admission, coming as three separate programs: an editor, compiler and runner. The process required loading each program in turn, saving your data every time before loading up and playing the adventure. If there was a bug – and there usually was – you had to repeat the whole routine, iron out the bug and try again. Then, the fateful meeting. In December 1984, Sean Ellis met Incentive's Ian Andrew at a Reading University Computer Club event. As the owner of a local software company, Ian gave students an overview of the software business, showing off Incentive's games and, no doubt, keeping half an eye open for potential employees. As Sean described his adventure creation utility to Ian, his commercially tuned brain lit up: this could be one of those high-ticket items he was looking for (Incentive would come to specialise in such pieces of software). Sean spent the Christmas holidays in 1984 cleaning up ADVAL, ready to demonstrate to Incentive in the new year.

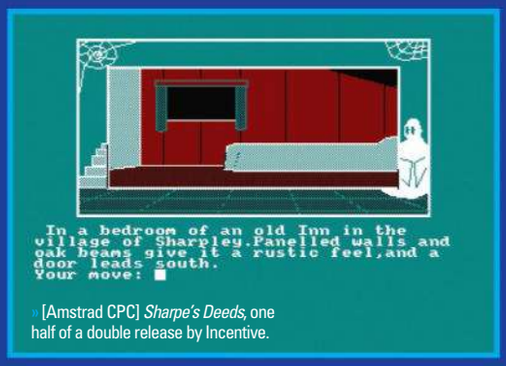
> "A NEW WAY OF WRITING ADVENTURES"
> **CRASH MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER 1986**


You,Gayleigh the gay and proud warrior,
are in a damp and uncomfortable cell.
The cell smells of unwashed underarms
and dried urine. A green slime, looking
suspiciously like gooseberry jam,
slides happily across the wall.
Enter Command...

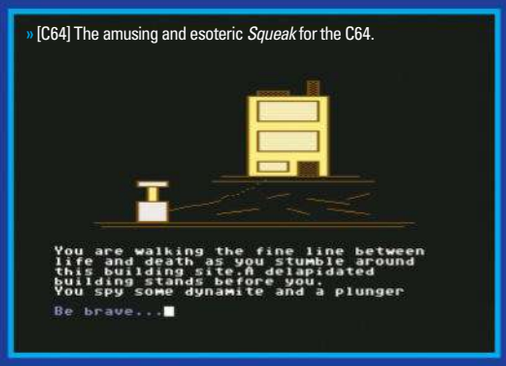
» [Amstrad CPC] *Dungeons, Amethysts, Alchemists 'N' Everything* was Mastertronic's attempt to capture a more mature audience with saucy content.

HOB'S
HOARD.
41
HOB'S HOARD is an adventure with character inter-action.For the cast of characters enter C, to start this adventure enter S.
what shall we do next ?

» [ZX Spectrum] Adventure specialists Zenobi Software enjoyed moderate success with its GAC-authored games.


In a bedroom of an old Inn in the village of Sharpley.Panelled walls and oak beams give it a rustic feel,and a door leads south.
Your move:

» [Amstrad CPC] *Sharpe's Deeds*, one half of a double release by Incentive.


You are walking the fine line between life and death as you stumble around this building site.A delapidated building stands before you.
You spy some dynamite and a plunger
Be brave...

» [C64] The amusing and esoteric *Squeak* for the C64.

BUILD YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

GAC EXPERT ZOË KIRK-ROBINSON IS READY TO GET YOUR ADVENTURE GOING WITH HER +6 TOME OF TIPS

QUICKSTART FOR A QUICKSTART

"Incentive kindly included a Quickstart file to save time. It's called QS.ADV, and it's an excellent set of starter commands, codes and messages that gives you the basics for most adventures. Load it up when you begin, and it will save you a lot of time."

RE-USE NOUNS AND VERBS

"You only have 256 verbs, nouns and adverbs available, so remember to re-use everything you can. This saves memory and allows you to use synonyms because you can add several words as the name, verb or noun number. For example, a switch set as noun 1 can also be a toggle or a lever."

MULTIPLE MESSAGES

"Any command can print multiple messages. This allows a long response to commands and also lets you change details inside examine results. Set a generalised message followed by a specific one, and you can create in-depth results that make your adventures come alive."

Room #1 is ...
The library. Here you can pick up a note pad and makes notes about your adventure. Why? Because Zoe said it is important and she once lost hours and hours of work because she did not save her work.
Connections are ...
1 W

KEEP A SCROLL HANDY

"Good adventures take many sessions, and you'll forget what you used Marker 7 for when you're knee-deep into your coding. Keep notes on what each marker is checking for, which room your objects will be used in, what your verbs/nouns are, and everything else. It saves hours."

AWESOME ADVERBS

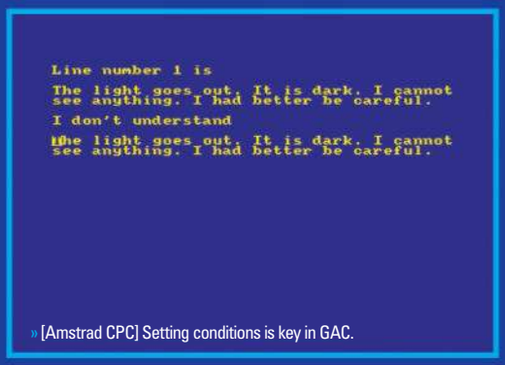
"Do you have different types of swords available? Or different coloured potions? Save memory by using size and colour adverbs alongside a generic noun. This way, all those coloured potion adverbs can be re-used for a series of coloured levers at another point in your game without reducing your memory overheads."

SAVE, SAVE AND SAVE

"I once lost six weeks of game coding because I accidentally deleted a vital piece of code over my latest adventure. Ouch! Since then, I have used multiple numbered save files, and I save every hour. Learn from my mistake; don't lose your games."

Our thanks to Zoë for her time. For more tips and instructional videos on The Graphic Adventure Creator, head to her website: gamehammer.co.uk/

» [Amstrad CPC] Your adventure begins here.


Line number 1 is
The light goes out. It is dark. I cannot see anything. I had better be careful.
I don't understand
The light goes out. It is dark. I cannot see anything. I had better be careful.

» [Amstrad CPC] Setting conditions is key in GAC.

» [Amstrad CPC] Exploring the spooky *Haunted House*.

GAC HIGHLIGHTS

SIX OF THE BEST GAC-AUTHORED ADVENTURES TO PLAY

You are huddled up in one corner of a SMALL WIGWAM.The only way out is through an OPEN FLAP.You can also see an INDIAN GUARD,a LARGE BLANKET
What now then partner?

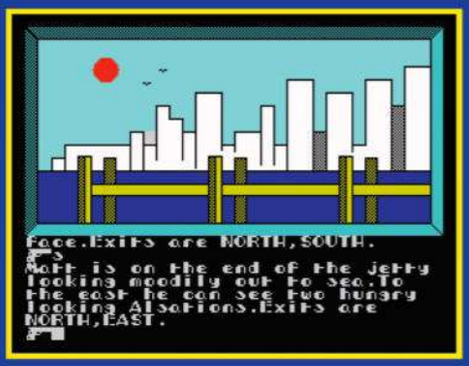
THE LEGEND OF APACHE GOLD

■ Having already produced Quilled adventures such as *Seabase Delta* and *Subsunk*, author Peter Torrance was soon in his GAC stride, submitting this amusing Western lampoon for Incentive's *Medallion* range. *Apache Gold* offers excellent graphics, a nicely balanced difficulty level and some humorous asides.

You are by the wreckage of your crashed Cessna light aircraft. You can see a fur coat,a pair of snowshoes.The aircraft radio crackles," Welcome to Winter Wonderland." and then cuts out.
What now? retro gamer forever

WINTER WONDERLAND

■ Released in tandem with *Apache Gold*, *Winter Wonderland* is another well-written adventure with a sweet balance that'll please beginners and veterans alike. The *Lost Horizon*-inspired plot ekes out intriguingly and, like *Apache Gold*, it boasts some atmospheric pictures to go with its prose.


face.Exits are NORTH,SOUTH.
Matt is on the end of the jetty looking moodily out to sea.To the east he can see two hungry looking Alsatians.Exits are NORTH,EAST.

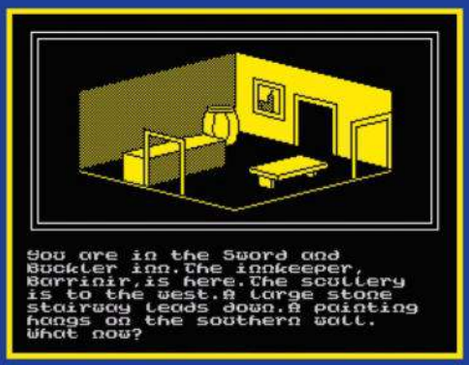
MATT LUCAS

■ Designed by Alex Williams and released by budget-software house Players in 1987, *Matt Lucas* is an enjoyably suave adventure inspired by the hit TV show of the time, *Miami Vice*. Your job is to track down an errant partner, and there are plenty of excellent descriptions and amusing jokes about Miami culture.

WORLD WAR II TANK. The hot stuffy atmosphere mingles with the irritating smell of gunfire and smoke.The exit is OUT.You can also see a LARGE GUN,a TIN of BLACK CAMOUFLAGE PAINT
Imagine your next move?:.
Imagine your next move?:.

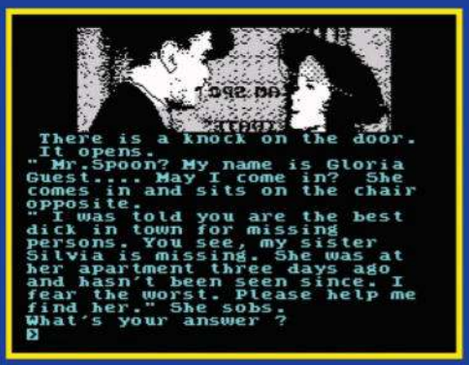
IMAGINATION

■ With Incentive quickly ducking out of the full-price adventure market, Peter Torrance turned back to budget games, releasing this curious mix of genres in late-1987. Effectively four adventures in one, *Imagination* begins at a desk, with the player able to select from four parodies of existing games.


You are in the Sword and Buckler inn.The innkeeper, Barrinir,is here.The scullery is to the west.A large stone stairway leads down.A painting hangs on the southern wall.
What now?

KARYSSIA: QUEEN OF DIAMONDS

■ Created by the siblings Darren and Robert Shacklady, *Karyssia: Queen Of Diamonds* was another Incentive Medallion release and one of the few GAC games to feature isometric graphics. Beyond the pretty display, it's also an articulate, if stereotypical, fantasy adventure.


There is a knock on the door. It opens.
" Mr.Spoon? My name is Gloria Guest.... May I come in? She comes in and sits on the chair opposite.
" I was told you are the best dick in town for missing persons. You see, my sister Silvia is missing. She was at her apartment three days ago and hasn't been seen since. I fear the worst. Please help me find her." She sobs.
What's your answer ?

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

■ This early GAC creation brilliantly manipulates the utility's code, resulting in some beautiful digitised stills from gumshoe movies. The player is Sam Spoon, detective for hire, and it's not long before a beautiful dame enters his office. Exhaustive descriptions and a captivating plot complete this superb budget adventure.

Incentive's first premises were an odd arrangement (see **RG**87's Archive feature on Incentive for more information), with its office, Ian's flat and stock rooms sitting above a small retail shop. Once Sean had finished exhibiting his program, The Graphic Adventure Creator was born as Ian Andrew gave advice on how the project should proceed. Ian's input boiled down to four key points: one, eliminate the need for users to have some experience in programming language, in the case of ADVAL, FORTH. Two, make the user interface less cluttered and easier to use; three, combine the three elements into one program; and finally, add a facility to create graphics to go with the room descriptions.

> "I ONCE LOST SIX WEEKS OF GAME CODING BECAUSE I ACCIDENTALLY DELETED A VITAL PIECE OF CODE"
> **ZOË KIRK-ROBINSON**

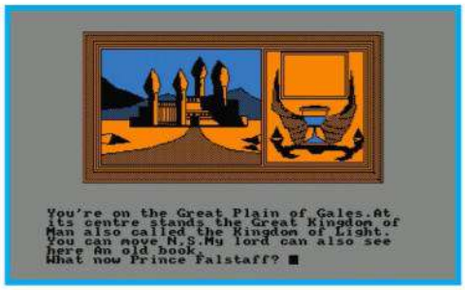
Sean got to work, and a few months later, The Graphic Adventure Creator was ready. "A New Way Of Writing Adventures," announced *Crash* magazine in September of 1986, and indeed, GAC provided interactive fiction fans the chance to write their own tales of action and intrigue. A year earlier, Amstrad owners received the first version, written by Sean, and effusively advertised by Incentive. "Create Your Own Graphic Adventures With The Most Powerful, Flexible And Easy To Use Utility Ever…" was its bold claim, and for once, the promotional eulogising was not misplaced.

After loading GAC, a long main menu of choices greets the user. In alphabetical order are the numerous commands and settings needed to make an adventure game work. Adverbs, nouns and verbs set the vital parts of speech you wish to include in your adventure. Objects is for allocating the interactive items in your world, while Room Descriptions is where the user types in their eloquent location-setting prose and sets the connections to the other rooms. The remaining three text-related functions are all conditions. Local Conditions assigns those particular events for each specific room.

Meanwhile, High Priority Conditions sets the status of the room before the player has had a chance to input anything. For example, if there's a light in the room, a High Condition will check whether it's on and whether the room is light or dark, informing the player accordingly. Finally, Low Priority Conditions define the reaction to the player's input similarly to Local Conditions but over the entirety of the map.

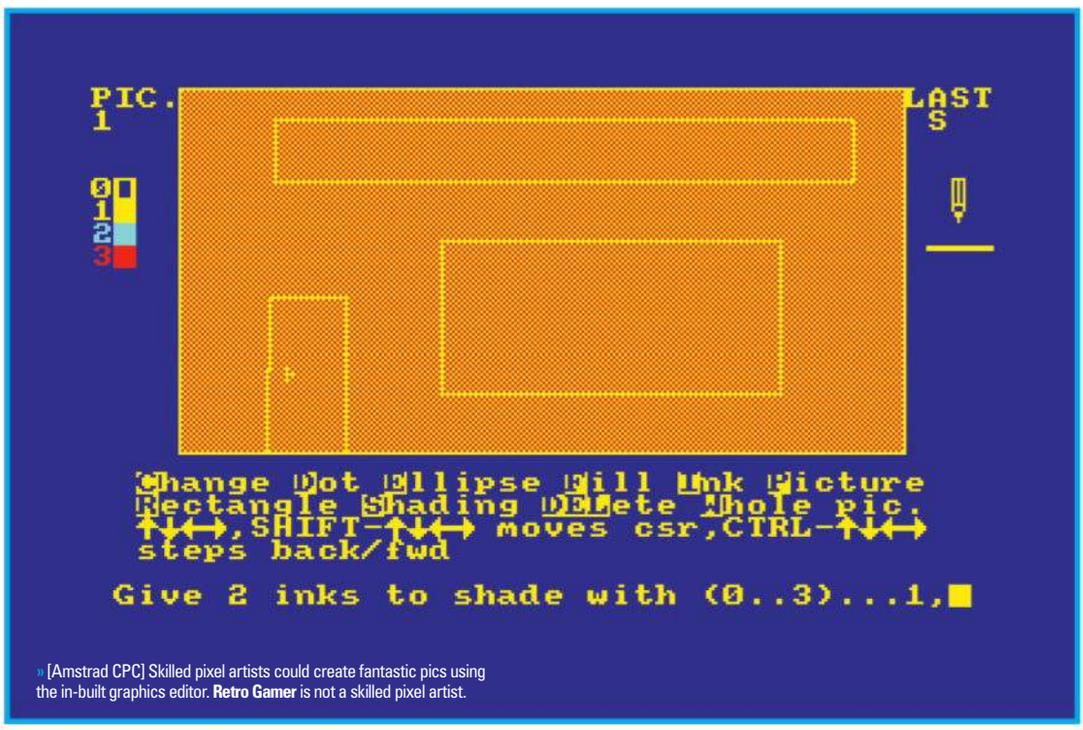
As the user devises descriptions and verbs, they can also draw graphics to accompany their rooms (it is called The GRAPHIC Adventure Creator, after all). After allocating a number

» The Incentive crew circa 1987. Malcolm 'The Kid' Hellon, author of the C64 version of The Graphic Adventure Creator, is top left.


You're on the Great Plain of Gales.At
its centre stands the Great Kingdom of
Man also called the Kingdom of Light.
You can move N,S.My lord can also see
here an old book.
What now Prince Falstaff?

» [Amstrad CPC] Exploring the Kingdom Of Speldom as Prince Falstaff.

» The Graphic Adventure Creator received high praise in the press.



» [Amstrad CPC] Skilled pixel artists could create fantastic pics using the in-built graphics editor. **Retro Gamer** is not a skilled pixel artist.

The market is busy most days.
Bendy's record stall is next
to Kath's wool stall & across
the street is Pete Squeals
fruit & veg barrow. The Sagmore
lies east. You can also see
Pete Squeal,Bendy
What now Guv?retro gamer rooles

THE GAC MASTER

RETRO GAMER LOOKS AT THE GAMES OF CHARLES A SHARP, GAC'S MOST PROLIFIC CREATOR

■ Author Charles A Sharp AKA The Dreaming Djinn dominated the commercial adventure market for two years, creating over a dozen adventures for budget-software houses such as Alternative and Top Ten Software. Charles swapped genres throughout this period, releasing sci-fi adventures such as *Necris Dome* and *Life-Term*, parodies like *Deadenders* and *SMASHED*, and even mixing the two with the amusing *Star Trek* satire *Star Wreck*. GAC's ease of use helped Charles port his games across all three major 8-bit formats, inciting chortles for Spectrum, Amstrad and C64 owners. While the above adventures are all fun, we'll always have a soft spot for the sporting antics of Charles' *Cricket Crazy* and *Football Frenzy*. Sadly, Charles has kept a low-key profile since the Eighties – Charles, if you're reading this, please get in touch with **Retro Gamer!**

"MASTERTRONIC'S PLAY IT AGAIN SAM SHOWED WHAT THE UTILITY WAS CAPABLE OF"

MARK HARDISTY

▶ to the picture, a rectangular window and cursor appear. Via a set of simple commands, this cursor can draw dots, lines, ellipses and rectangles. With these tools, patience and an understanding of what you're trying to draw, the user can easily assemble an impressive picture before using the Ink command to add colour to their creation. Upon completion, the player assigns their picture to a specific room under the Room Description option.

With its ability to string multiple commands and other complex phrases, GAC quickly proved a hit with the press despite its high price tag and Incentive's controversial use of the Lenslok anti-piracy device. "All in all, Graphic Adventure Creator is the most astounding program I've ever encountered on an eight-bit machine," raved *Amtix*'s Sean Masterson before giving the Incentive utility an incredible final score of 98%. "The neat simplicity and power of the commands, coupled with the tiny 17K the program takes up, puts it far ahead of any competitor," concluded the magazine's resident adventure critic.

Versions for the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 were soon put into action by Incentive. With Sean Ellis busy on his next adventure, ST Adventure Creator for the Atari ST, Spectrum duties were handled by Brendan Kelly, as Malcolm 'The Kid' Hellon juggled the tricky 6502 task, and 'Crazy' Dave Kirby the pared-down BBC and Electron ports. All written by regular Incentive freelancers, every version of The Graphic Adventure Creator scored highly.

Few reviewers quibbled over GAC's high price, and this aspect even helped the utility achieve greater sales. Incentive had already established a relationship with the Book Club Associates; The Graphic Adventure Creator's premium RRP made it a prime candidate for the BCA's Game Of The Month. Via its leaflets, the BCA tempted cash-strapped gamers with an incredible joining offer before committing them to a monthly purchase at a not-quite-so-enticing discount. GAC, priced at just under 25 quid, was perfect for the Game Of The Month, the software you were automatically sent – and charged for – should you forget to select your monthly game.

Buoyed by the utility's success, Incentive set up a label, Medallion, to publish the best adventures submitted to it. Peter Torrance's *The Legend Of Apache Gold* and Tim Walsha's *Winter Wonderland* got the series off to a good start, but sales quickly dwindled as the genre lost popularity, at least at the higher price point. Budget GAC-authored adventures, however, persisted, with one man, Charles A Sharp, particularly prolific, creating over a dozen graphical adventures during the late-Eighties.

Yet while it may have lacked the ability to produce technically distinctive and commercially viable games (indeed, GAC's, and latterly the Professional Adventure Writer's very existence and ease of use are sometimes credited as one of the reasons adventure games flooded the market, reducing their value to publishers), The Graphic Adventure Creator was responsible for firing thousands of imaginations into creating their own worlds, perils, treasure and more. Now, finally, someone with no or little programming skills could easily conjure up a graphical adventure for others to enjoy and puzzle over. And with adventure games enjoying a renaissance thanks to magazines such as *Classic Adventurer*, its legacy is still being felt today. ✱

Dedicated to the memory of Sean Ellis, who sadly passed away in 2020.

» Incentive's original cover for GAC was actually rejected by WHSmith due to the maiden's skimpy outfit. Artist Pete Carter duly gave her more coverage.

» *Winter Wonderland*, one of two initial releases under Incentive's Medallion label.

» After GAC, Sean Ellis worked on a 16-bit version for the Atari ST.

Its slumber disturbed, the snake rears its foul head and bites you! The poison kills you quickly and painlessly.
Your score was 20 and you took 11 turns.
Press a key for another game...

» [ZX Spectrum] This short adventure, *King's Ransom*, was bundled with The Graphic Adventure Creator.

THE BARD'S TALE

RETRO GAMER CHATS TO CLASSIC ADVENTURER EDITOR MARK HARDISTY ABOUT ADVENTURE GAMES AND THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR

Do you remember the first adventure game you played?
Yes – it was *The Sphinx Adventure*, a game bundled with my first computer. I received an Acorn Electron for Christmas 1984.

What do you love so much about the genre?
My teenage imagination was filled with exotic locations, fantastic creatures and daring adventures, fuelled by *The Lord Of The Rings* and *Fighting Fantasy* books. Text adventures were the next step into that world, giving me more control over the story with non-linear narratives. With games such as *Twin Kingdom Valley*, *The Hobbit* and *Sherlock*, the inhabitants came alive and had minds of their own.

Did you ever use The Graphic Adventure Creator?
I never had the opportunity to own and use GAC. As with the Professional Adventure Writer, it was a premium utility, and £22.95 was way out of reach for a young lad with limited disposable income.

What do you think of it today?
GAC had its foibles and wasn't as easy to develop with as The Quill, predominantly down to it evolving from Sean Ellis' own quirky adventure language. Regardless, once a developer mastered the tool, they seemed to be able to turn out some pretty competent games. Authors such as Charles Sharp were very prolific, and Mastertronic's *Play It Again Sam* showed what the utility was capable of.

Do you have any favourite GAC adventures?
I have a fondness for Alex Williams' *Matt Lucas*, pretending I'm Don Johnson, solving crimes and driving around in a Ferrari. Great stuff.

Do you think the availability of utilities such as The Graphic Adventure Creator helped the demise of adventure games in the mid to late-Eighties?
No – quite the opposite. I think they gave innovative writers who couldn't program the tools to turn their ideas into fast, machine-code-driven, commercial-grade text adventures. It was the publishers that abandoned the genre in favour of visceral arcade experiences. However, some of the best adventures were created during this period, such as Level 9's *Scapeghost* and Magnetic Scrolls' *Corruption*.

Who's been your favourite interviewee in *Classic Adventurer*?
I've done so many and enjoyed them all immensely. It was a pleasure to do a huge feature on a hero of mine – Fergus McNeill, author of my favourite adventure game, *The Big Sleaze*, and such a wonderful, funny, creative genius. Others that spring to mind are Trevor Lever and Peter Jones, who created *Hampstead*, *Terrormolinos* and *Dodgy Geezers*. Lastly, I was the first person in twenty years to interview Anita Sinclair of Magnetic Scrolls. She was warm, highly intelligent, articulate and had a razor-sharp memory.

Thanks to Mark for his time – you can download PDFs of *The Classic Adventurer* for free at classicadventurer.co.uk/

Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers

PLEASE RESCUE ME FROM FATHER TIME

» NES » 1990 » CAPCOM

The march of time rarely gets to me – I'd be in the wrong job if it did – but sometimes, I can't help but notice that I'm getting older. I've been working on **Retro Gamer** for a decade now, and I was in my mid-20s when I started – definitely pretty young, although already getting on a bit as far as games journalists go. These days, I'm closer to being middle-aged than teenaged, most of my friends have kids of their own and I've even fulfilled my destiny of becoming Weird Uncle Nick. Amidst all of that, I occasionally wonder if I'm slowing down with age.

The game that most recently inspired such a crisis of confidence was *Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers*. Dear reader, I *struggled* with the first stage of this game as a fully grown adult. It was a show that I watched while growing up, and this attractive platform tie-in was surely aimed squarely at kids like me. I know games used to be far harder back then, but apparently some reviewers considered it to be fairly easy, and I can remember seeing the end of many such platformers at a young age. I actually ended up chastising myself over this, thinking, "30 years ago, I could have done this – why can't I now?"

I tried, failed, tried again, failed some more and eventually conquered that first stage. Once I had the skill to do that, the second fell pretty quickly and I was fine from there. That struggle made me remember some things – back when I was a kid, I had more time to learn. Success didn't feel so urgent because I didn't have so much to do and perhaps most crucially of all, I'd overlooked my tendency to resort to cheat cartridges when things got too frustrating. So it's not that I've become worse at games, I just play honestly now – or at least, that's my excuse.

A TRIBUTE TO GRAFTGOLD

GRAFTGOLD SHAPED THE 8-BIT AND 16-BIT ERAS WITH ORIGINAL TITLES AND CONVERSIONS SUCH AS PARADROID, QUAZATRON AND RAINBOW ISLANDS. FOUNDER STEVE TURNER AND LEGEND ANDREW BRAYBROOK HELP RETRO GAMER CELEBRATE GRAFTGOLD'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY

Words by Rory Milne

ANDREW BRAYBROOK

Andrew Braybrook helped define Graftgold with *Paradroid* and *Uridium*, and drove its Amiga output with hit games like *Rainbow Islands* and *Fire & Ice*. He's now working on *Monster Molecules*.

STEVE TURNER

Graftgold founder Steve Turner created Spectrum classics like *Dragontorc*, *Quazatron* and *Ranarama*, and mentored a team of talented developers. He's currently developing *Deepest Blue*.

Uridium restoration courtesy of Gary Arnott

Graftgold began as ST Software, which Steve Turner formed in 1983 before being joined by fellow coder Andrew Braybrook. Their debut titles were the arcade-inspired shoot-'em-ups *3D Space Wars*, *3D Seiddab Attack* and *3D Lunattack*, which Steve developed with Andrew on conversion duties.

Steve's fantasy arcade adventure *Avalon* followed in 1984, and in 1985 its sequel *Dragontorc* and spiritual successor *Astroclone* appeared. 1985 also saw Andrew develop the colourful collect-'em-up *Gribbly's Day Out* and his seminal combat droid title *Paradroid* which received huge acclaim on the Commodore 64. This was also the year that ST Software became Graftgold.

Graftgold impressed gamers and critics alike throughout the Eighties with Andrew's impossibly slick, high-speed shooter *Uridium*, combat racer *Alleykat*, space epic *Morpheus* and compelling puzzler *Intensity*. Meanwhile, Steve wowed with his *Paradroid*-inspired *Quazatron*, *Ranarama* and *Magnetron*, before developing the RPG arcade title *Bushido: The Way Of The Warrior*.

During this time, Graftgold new hires helped Steve and Andrew convert *Flying Shark*, *Super Off Road* and *Rainbow Islands*, and created the side-scrollers *Orion* and *Soldier Of Fortune*.

The early Nineties saw Graftgold embrace 16-bit systems with the 3D shooter *Simulcra*, the war game *Realms*, the entertaining platformers *Fire & Ice* and *The Ottifants*, and sequels *Paradroid 90* and *Uridium 2*. There were more conversions too.

As the decade passed, Graftgold released the arcade-style *Empire Soccer 94* and the sprawling shooter *Virocop*, before signing off with the off-road motorcycle racer *International Moto X* for Sony's popular PlayStation.

Although this was the end of an era for the studio, Graftgold sold its IP to Jester Interactive after closing down. Jester produced the Game Boy Advance titles *Uridium Advance* and *Paradroid* in the mid-2000s, but sadly neither was released. However, hope remains that Jester will someday continue Graftgold's legacy.

DRAGONTORC

VARIOUS • 1985

Steve Turner's *Avalon* sequel retains the structure of its predecessor while offering an entirely new adventure and more character interaction. *Dragontorc*'s exploration and battles are arcade-style experiences, but casting spells is achieved by selecting them from a menu. The game's multipart object and obstacle-based puzzles require trial and error, although not too much as there are only so many locations to search and characters to trade with.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"I wanted to give players influence over the characters. I thought I'd make the elves wary at first, but then if you traded with them they would become friendly, and follow you around. They would even fight your enemies. But if you attacked them they would *become* your enemies."

GRIBBLY'S DAY OUT

COMMODORE 64 • 1985

As with many of the best original games, *Gribbly's Day Out* defies categorisation. It has platforms, but it's not a platformer, and its hero fires bubbles at evolving foes, but it's not a shooter. At its heart, it's a rescue mission requiring exploration through treacherous environments. You can hop along surfaces and levitate, although the pull of gravity makes precise movement tricky.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"I had just done conversions of *3D Space Wars* and *Seiddab Attack*, and *3D Lunattack* twice! So I wanted to design a game that wasn't a shoot-'em-up. I came up with a side-on environment with creatures that had a purpose, and just bubbles instead of bullets. It was a round-'em-up rather than a shoot-'em-up."

PARADROID

COMMODORE 64 • 1985

At first glance, *Paradroid* looks like a top-down shooter, and it could be played like one. But that would deprive you of upgrades to take on more powerful droids than yours, and that's all of them! The solution is to harness their superior capabilities by taking control of them in an ingenious minigame, where you aim to connect more circuits to them than they connect to you.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"Seeing the *Zzap!64* Gold Medal *Paradroid* review and *that* cover art was a great moment. It felt like I had proven to myself that I could do my new job of designing and producing games. It was mostly designed up front, and I wasn't aware until much later that it had such a strong design, so much so that it's still talked about 40 years later."

MEMORABLE MECHANICS KEY ASPECTS OF THE TOP-DOWN CLASSIC'S GAMEPLAY

LINE OF SIGHT

Ship decks have adjoining rooms with closed doors, and you can't tell if there are droids behind those doors until you open them.

BRAIN OR BRAWN

You can blast droids if they're weaker than the one you're controlling, but superior models should only be taken on in a transfer game.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Retreat can be the better part of valour. Your Influence Device is rated 001, the lowest rating, whereas his foes are rated up to 999.

BEAM ME UP

The decks of *Paradroid*'s space freighter are plagued by droids, but you don't need to clear those decks in order to beam between them.

EPIC EXPLORATION

A few of *Paradroid*'s ship decks just have a single room, but the majority have far more. The ship has 20 decks, which adds up to a lot of exploration.

ASTROCLONE

ZX SPECTRUM • 1985

The fourth *Seiddab* title has more in common with *Avalon* and *Dragontorc* than the likes of *3D Seiddab Attack*. That said, travelling between the game's planets and spaceships involves no-nonsense side-scrolling shoot-'em-up sections that bring to mind the earlier games in the series. Its worlds and ships are full of enemy droids that you target and blast, so that's another *Seiddab* call back. Otherwise, the focus is on using objects to overcome obstacles like in Steve's magical arcade adventures.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"One of the influences on *Astroclone* was a crosshair Andrew Braybrook was playing around with in *Paradroid*. He was trying to get it to move around the screen, and it was going to be used to aim his droid's gun, but he couldn't do it. So I thought I would see if I could do that in *Astroclone*, and it worked out pretty well."

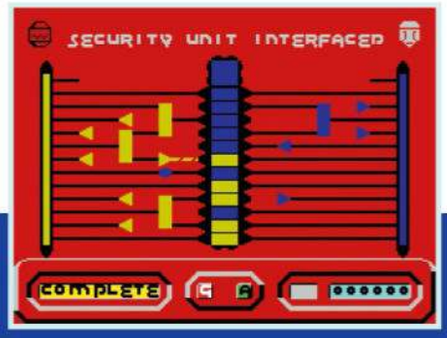
URIDIUM

VARIOUS • 1986

It seems counterintuitive to have a shoot-'em-up that runs at a rate of knots but requires you to slow right down to avoid hazards, but that requirement turns what could have been a mindless shooter into a compelling test of flying skill. There are still intense firefights on offer in *Uridium*, but as you make progress through its levels the increasingly likely threat of deadly raised features elevates the game's challenge to another level.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"Players would get used to the controls, so it was natural to try to make things a little bit harder by giving them obstacles to think about. Around level 13 I designed scenery that required rotating the Manta on its side to steer through narrow places, so that players had to prioritise and take additional risks."



QUAZATRON

ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

In some ways, *Quazatron* feels like two games. Navigating its sprawling isometric peaks and slopes in search of enemy droids is a challenge in itself, and then you have mechanics that are borrowed and adapted from *Paradroid*. The information points, teleportation pads and patrol route mechanics driving the rogue robots in *Quazatron* work the same as they do in its C64 counterpart. However, *Quazatron*'s protagonist KLP-2 is cuter than *Paradroid*'s heroic Influence Device.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"I designed *Quazatron*'s world before I had an idea for the game. I even made a character that went up and down the slopes. Then Andrew Braybrook suggested I put robots in just like *Paradroid*, and that way his algorithms would work. So I did, and then I thought I might as well put all of *Paradroid*'s mechanics in."

COMPARISON CAPERS

THE WAYS QUAZATRON DIFFERS FROM PARADROID

GAINING PERSPECTIVE

■ Where *Paradroid* is top-down with flat surfaces, *Quazatron* is isometric with inclines to travel up and down. Naturally gravity is a factor, as it puts heavier droids at a distinct disadvantage.

HEIGHT ADVANTAGE

■ Each of *Paradroid*'s rooms are walled in, so there's nowhere to fall. However *Quazatron*'s raised playfields are surrounded by water, and you can ram droids at lower altitudes into it.

ON THE LEVEL

■ Unlike *Paradroid*'s confined freighter decks, *Quazatron* plays out in a much more open world. Adding to its focus on exploration are the vast, stepped summits that dominate its levels.

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

■ *Quazatron*'s transfer game plays the same as *Paradroid*'s, but its reward differs. You take the parts you want from beaten droids, and their condition depends on how decisively you won.

ALLEYKAT

COMMODORE 64 • 1986

Far from a simple combat racer, *Alleykat* offers various different race formats. It also requires a degree of strategy. Your shooting capability and racing speed are connected, in that when you sweep your craft's wings back you gain extra speed, but this comes at the cost of having less effective weapons. You also have to replace energy you lose when you collide with opponents and scenery by collecting more during races. There are eight different race types, and although you can skip any you aren't good at, their prize money often tempts you to enter. This comes at a cost, however, as the entry fee for races goes up relative to the cash paid out.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"I was making various scenery types more or less sturdy, and that introduced challenges to destroy as much scenery as possible or avoid flying into tough parts. I found some people favoured particular race types. That's when I came up with seasons where you decided which races to enter, knowing that you needed to win enough cash to keep going, and so couldn't skip too many."

WINNING WAYS A GUIDE TO GRAFTGOLD'S TACTICAL COMBAT RACER

GATHERING GUINEAS

■ Races are initially free to enter, but you need to win Guineas to cover the entry fees of later contests.

FUN FORMATS

■ As well as speed tests and time trials, there are races that reward destruction and not destroying things.

TOP TACTICS

■ Collect any Guineas found on the tracks, and complete races at all costs as this gets you the prize money you need.

EPIC ENEMIES

■ Your rivals mainly have the same lasers as you, whereas the Katerkiller just crashes into its opponents.

FIRE POWER

■ The eight standard craft take multiple hits to dispatch; the Katerkiller goes down one segment at a time.

MORPHEUS

COMMODORE 64 • 1987

The different aspects of *Morpheus* are cleverly linked together. With its shoot-'em-up element you're paid a bounty for blasting fixed numbers of enemies that pour out of generators. Clearing levels depends on dispatching them all, and between stages you can spend your bounty on better weapons and defences, some of which require ship expansions that eat into your earnings. These improvements then allow you to take on the more dangerous and less vulnerable foes in the subsequent levels. Additional strategy is required by the fact that new versions of the power-ups are constantly being made available, and so it sometimes pays to put up with ageing equipment while waiting for the latest upgrade to become available.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"The idea was to develop a ship with features that would get you to the end of the game. At that time, there were arcade games with lots of power-ups, and with some I couldn't see the benefit of the upgrades. So in *Morpheus* the ship's components were clearly shown on the screen so that you could see what they were, and hopefully what they were doing."

RANARAMA

VARIOUS • 1987

If ever there was an example of iteration paying dividends it's *Ranarama*. Just like *Paradroid* and *Quazatron* its levels and its enemies are ranked, and you start off weaker than any of them on the opening stage. There's also a minigame played against the clock that you have to win to beat opponents, but you fight against wizards and not their lackeys, and it involves sorting jumbled letters rather than fusing circuits to enemy droids. The iteration also pays off with the game's upgrades, which are split into categories like *Quazatron*, but instead of simply choosing these you have to run around collecting them after defeated wizards drop them.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"It started as a fantasy *Paradroid*. I asked Andrew Braybrook if he could do some *Paradroid* graphics on the Spectrum, and the 3D look he came up with looked really nice, so I thought about how to do the gameplay. I suppose I merged *Paradroid* and *Avalon* into one idea, where the Defence spell in *Ranarama* was the equivalent of the droids' armour in *Paradroid*, and the Missile spell was the equivalent of their weapons."

FLYING SHARK

VARIOUS • 1987

Graftgold's first coin-op conversions are impressive, not least because the Spectrum and Amstrad adaptations only took six weeks to develop. They particularly impress with their smooth scrolling, especially since that's not something either system naturally excels at. The arcade game is known for its endless enemies, huge bosses and epic stages, and those are all there in the conversions. In fact, the only real concessions made are the lack of colour and arcade-quality sound effects.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"Telecomsoft had been let down, and it needed several *Flying Shark* conversions done really quickly, so it was prepared to pay extra. Paul Hibbard from Telecomsoft showed us the game, and it looked like it needed the same mechanism as Dominic Robinson's Spectrum *Uridium*. So we sat around discussing it, and Dominic said he thought he could do it in that timeframe."

FLIGHT CHECK

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE TAKING OFF

FEARSOME FOES

■ As well as formations of one-hit aircraft and cannons, *Flying Shark* also has sub-bosses that take several shots to take down.

MIGHTY MAYORS

■ You can tell the bosses in *Flying Shark* by their sheer size. They can take multiple hits, so powered-up weapons are a must.

PERFECT PICK-UPS

■ There are upgrades for your standard weapon so it fires more ammo quicker, plus shields, energy, bombs, torpedoes and mines.

SUPERB SETTINGS

■ There's a jungle with ground forces, an open sea with battleships and boats, and a desert with tanks – all with air support!

SOUND STRATEGIES

■ Hold back until you know what's coming over the horizon, and watch different enemies' attack patterns, as they don't change.

MAGNETRON

VARIOUS • 1988

The environments in *Magnetron* are isometric like in *Quazatron*, but they're flick-screen rather than scrolling. You blast droids too, but rather than one weapon there are five. These are obtained by taking over enemy droids, which is done by solving sliding tile puzzles, but the more advanced your opponent is compared to you the less time you get to solve the puzzle. Droids with better weapons weigh more, so can take longer to ascend slopes, meaning choosing which droids to transfer to is a balancing act. They all self-destruct once they're out of energy, but in time they get replaced. This is because rather than clearing stages of droids, *Magnetron*'s core objective is to disable reactors by adding and taking away positively charged rods and negatively charged inhibitors. You carry these between reactors, which gives your droid a positive or negative charge. This can make positively and negatively charged ramps problematic, as they repel or propel your droid in unexpected ways.

INTENSITY

VARIOUS • 1988

The primary goal in *Intensity* is to use a drone to rescue colonists from ports dotted around space stations. You do this for money rather than altruism, so how many you rescue is up to you. An exit to the next level flashes when you've saved enough to leave, but you can keep rescuing more to trigger exits to later levels. Complicating this are the evolving aliens that the colonists need to be rescued from, and this is where a second craft called a Skimmer comes in. It can destroy the aliens in their earlier forms of evolution by colliding with them, although in their later forms they can degrade or destroy your Skimmer and drone. As well as reward money, currency gets released on each stage, all of which you use to buy better drones and Skimmers between levels. There are also collectible craft upgrades on some stages.

BUSHIDO: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

COMMODORE 64 • 1989

Best described as an arcade RPG, *Bushido* lets you play as characters based on the archetypes of Feudal Japan. Focussed around late-night fortress raids, your challenges include sneaking past, bribing and fighting guards, taking on bosses and seeking out hidden objects that you require in order to make progress. As well as weapons and defences, there are ingredients that you combine in pairs to create magic potions. Your chosen character can get injured in battle and tired from undertaking missions, so between these you get the option of resting and healing. If you excel in missions you can be asked to join an army.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"I added RPG elements to put depth in the game without it taking a lot more time to make. I was harking back to the *D&D*-style games I did, what I really wanted to do was *Avalon* on the C64. But I replaced the adventure element with arcade challenges because the C64 people in the company said that C64 gamers would want a more arcadey game."

ALTERNATE APPROACHES

HOW YOUR DECISIONS SHAPE YOUR PROGRESS

CHARACTER BUILDING

■ Before your first mission you train your character to build-up their skills. Missions take their toll, and characters have to recover, especially as they age.

OBJECT LESSON

■ Items are hidden behind walls, on shelves and among furniture. These include rations, shields, armour, keys, ingredients, cash, wands and useful magic objects.

LEVELLING UP

■ There are nine levels within the enemy fortress, each with its own guards. If you kill any of them, an alert is raised and the remaining guards on patrol will become more aggressive.

STEALTH VS STRENGTH

■ The approach taken to missions depends on your chosen character. The Ninja is adept at avoiding detection, whereas the Samurai is highly effective in combat.

RAINBOW ISLANDS

VARIOUS • 1990

The fact that Graftgold's five initial conversions of *Rainbow Islands* and subsequent three adaptations all received sky-high ratings speaks volumes about their quality. They're accurate in every important respect, right down to the epic bosses. Even the eight-bit versions feel like the original, despite having fewer colours and lower resolution. Like the coin-op, the goal is to ascend vertical levels while grabbing collectibles. You do so by creating rainbows, which you use as makeshift platforms and to squash foes.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"*Rainbow Islands* gave us a break from thinking of game ideas, we just had to work through the seven islands and make sure we put in all the game features. Taito sent us its original design document and provided us with some graphics, less as the islands progressed, which we had to adjust to a more limited palette. Then we had to get five versions done in about six months."

PARADROID 90

VARIOUS • 1990

There was a lot of fuss made over *Paradroid 90* scrolling vertically but not horizontally, but as this doesn't affect its gameplay it seems like an unfair criticism. It's more of an expansion of the C64 original than a straight conversion anyway, with the greater resolution of the 16-bit computers being used to render larger rooms with many more environmental features, some of which are destructible. The unique appearances of its Influence Device and his droid opponents are depicted in-game, unlike *Paradroid*, where they had different numbers but otherwise looked identical. *Paradroid 90* also has pirates!

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"I tried to add features that wouldn't divert from the original's design. The transfer game was slightly bigger, and the robot played intelligently rather than randomly. Then the pirates added tension when there were few robots left. The crates were an extension of the fruit and rainbows in *Rainbow Islands*. They were part of the background but they could be destroyed, and we could hide things underneath them."

SIMULCRA

VARIOUS • 1990

For a number of reasons, *Simulcra* is a tough game to describe. It dips into several genres in that it has a shoot-'em-up element, maze-like levels with collectibles, and both ground and flight-based mechanics. Then there's its 3D viewpoint, which gives you the feel of a FPS when you're on the ground and a flight sim for the short spells when you're gliding around at a low altitude. In either environment, you're tasked with taking out energy barrier projectors, and the enemy craft and fixed weapon systems protecting them. The point of all of this wanton destruction is the deactivation of a rogue AI-powered machine known as the Simulcra unit.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"I took over *Simulcra* when Dominic Robinson left. He had tanks driving around chequered ground areas, an aeroplane-type craft and he had used *Paradroid*'s patrol point system to drive the enemies around. So it was a question of making those elements into a game."

SYSTEM ERROR HOW TO RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

PERFECT PILOTING
■ It's easier to hit ground targets in Tank Mode, but in Flight Mode you can fly over chasms and dogfight with aerial foes.

AMAZING MAZES
■ You drive around brightly coloured maze-like tracks when you're on the ground that are peppered with enemies and hazards.

COOL COLLECTIBLES
■ Defeated opponents release all sorts of pick-ups, including speed boosts, seek and destroy missiles and wings.

ECLECTIC ENEMIES
■ Your foes range from gun turrets and tanks launching rockets to fighter jets taking pot shots while patrolling the skies.

PROJECTOR PUMMELLING
■ You can't leave a level until you take out its energy projector; with it destroyed that stage's energy barriers collapse.

SUPER OFF ROAD

VARIOUS • 1990

The single-screen levels and tiny sprites in the *Super Off Road* coin-op are perfectly suited to 8-bit and 16-bit conversions, and Graftgold pulled that off with aplomb with its eight adaptations. The game is somewhat like an isometric version of *Super Sprint*, but there's a little more to its frantic races. Games are played over seasons, with collectibles such as cash and Nitro appearing on the courses throughout the races. You get to spend prize money on upgrading almost every aspect of your vehicle, including its tyres, shock absorbers, top speed, road handling, acceleration and Nitro boosts. The AI drivers present a worthy challenge, but Graftgold's computer and console conversions really come into their own with their two or three-player multiplayer modes.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"The coin-op had three steering wheels on it and a huge screen, so we couldn't get it into the office. So we dismantled it in my garage, then took the pieces in and connected them to the *Rainbow Islands* cabinet that we had in the office."

REALMS

VARIOUS • 1991

Based in a fantasy world of warring elves, dwarfs and orcs, *Realms* is a real-time strategy game, where the aim is to conquer a kingdom. You do this by raising armies, and this is done city by city. These have to have sufficient populations of fit and healthy fighting age citizens, so you first have to make sure they're well fed with grain, have land to cultivate and have city walls to defend them from attacks. You fund all of this by levying taxes. Another consideration is the effectiveness of your armies, which depends on the size of the cities they come from and how many armies you've raised from those cities in the past. You also have to consider your soldiers' wages, weapons and armour, all of which affect their morale and success in the wars fought to expand your empire.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"John Cumming suggested a game called *Rome* where you controlled legions, but we couldn't find anyone that was interested. It then evolved into *Battle Of Britain*, until Virgin suggested a fantasy theme instead. So it became *Realms*, but the structure was essentially the same throughout."

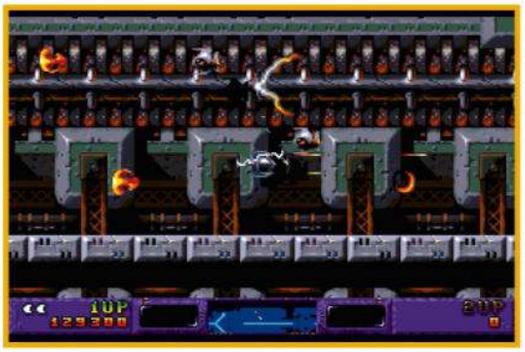
FIRE & ICE

VARIOUS • 1992

Released in the wake of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Fire & Ice* is a cute animal platformer with a narrative running through its levels that informs their environments. The storyline also shapes the mechanics governing the way you control the player character. You start in a frozen land with slidey ice platforms, but as you head south the climate warms, there are watery worlds you swim through, and these lead to humid jungles and arid deserts. Throughout these transitions you collect key parts required to unlock levels, and there are rescue mission side quests.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"We started with a floppy-eared, bouncy main character, but *Renegade* suggested a more conventional control mode and a character that behaved more like a certain hedgehog. Having this run-and-jump movement led us down a more traditional route, but I was thinking how simplistic the jumping was in *Rainbow Islands*. So I had different control parameters to make the coyote slip, slide and go underwater. As development continued, we came up with ice towers, clams and bubbles as ways to move upwards. Downwards was easier because gravity was on your side."



URIDIUM 2

AMIGA • 1993

The advantages of the Amiga over the C64 allow *Uridium 2* to outdo its predecessor in several ways. Its level designs, Manta, enemies and effects look stunning, and it sounds every bit as good as the coin-ops of the day. The sequel also features four-way scrolling instead of being restricted to the horizontal plane, and players are spoilt for choice with weapons and other power-ups instead of constantly using the same laser cannons. The follow-up has a two-player co-op mode, and speech samples depicting your Manta's on-board AI assist. Finally, there's a side-on shoot-'em-up bonus game where you have to destroy the Dreadnoughts' reactor cores.

ANDREW'S MEMORIES

"Power-ups were appearing in most games, so I added some to *Uridium 2*. Having two weapons that only hit ground targets changed the game when you had them, as you couldn't shoot enemy ships until you had used them. The homing missiles and seeker really did help take out enemies quickly, but many of the other power-ups were no better than the main guns. I might do those differently now."

VIROCOP

AMIGA • 1995

Graftgold's mid-Nineties shooter *Virocop* was its final title for the Amiga, and it's a worthy swan song for the popular 16-bit system. The game's shoot-'em-up element is facilitated by its protagonist, a machine-gun-toting droid called DAVE, who it has to be said bears a passing resemblance to KLP-2. You can equip him with increasingly powerful weapon upgrades, which are needed to defeat the increasingly tough bosses at the end of the levels. The game's firefights are complemented by a requirement to negotiate mazes, ramps, slopes and other tests of skill that are peppered throughout the stages. Each of these is themed around a different game genre.

STEVE'S MEMORIES

"*Virocop* started off as a tank game with a working title of *Tanky 2*, which had a miniature tank in it that went on missions. We took that up to Renegade, but it turned its nose up at it. So I suggested putting a character in that was like KLP-2. We had a lot of trainee artists, so we picked a different scenario for each level and put a different artist on each of them. That was where the idea of basing the levels on different game genres came from."

THE MAKING OF SPELLBOUND DIZZY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **DEVELOPER:** BIG RED SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, AMIGA, ATARI ST
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

HYPED AS DIZZY'S LARGEST ADVENTURE AND PACKED WITH A CHECKLIST OF PUZZLES, SPELLBOUND DIZZY WAS CAPABLE OF KEEPING FANS OF THE SERIES ENTHRALLED FOR MONTHS. IT ALSO SHOWED THAT BIG RED SOFTWARE HAD CRACKED THE FRANCHISE'S FORMULA AND THEY'RE HERE TO TELL US HOW THEY DID IT

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MAGICLAND DIZZY

RELEASED: 1990

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS

SEYMOUR GOES TO HOLLYWOOD (PICTURED)

RELEASED: 1991

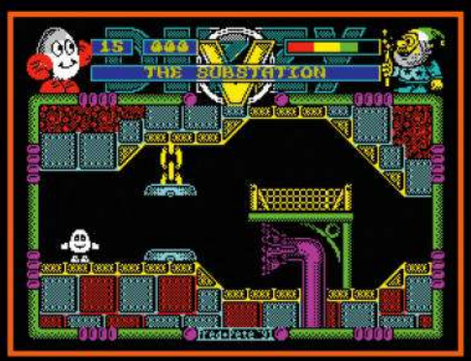
PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS

STEG THE SLUG

RELEASED: 1992

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, COMMODORE 64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, DOS

» [ZX Spectrum] On balance, this *Dizzy* game was rather good fun, with plenty for adventurers to get their teeth into.



» [ZX Spectrum] The Spectrum version of *Spellbound Dizzy* made great use of colour.

Fingers hovered over the telephone dial for the umpteenth time: 0 – 8 – 9 – 1, they tapped, then 5 – 5 – 5 – 0 – 0 – 3. Within seconds a recording began that regaled callers with a bunch of hints and tips about *Spellbound Dizzy*, the fifth adventure game featuring Codemasters' anthropomorphic egg. Sure, it came at a cost – 36p per minute if you were calling off-peak and 48p per minute at other times – but for those desperate to solve the game's myriad mind-boggling puzzles, it felt worth every penny.

Spellbound Dizzy was difficult and frustrating but it was also varied and absolutely huge, with the latter fact worn like a badge of honour. As well as flagging up the game's size on the packaging ("BIGGEST and BEST adventure yet," it screamed), it was even mentioned in the game itself (click a message icon at the start of the Spectrum version, for instance, and it told you it was bigger than *Dizzy III* and *IV* put together). In fact, you couldn't really play this game without knowing there were 105 rooms (in most versions, at least). But, boy, developers Big Red Software didn't half make you work to see them all.

There was a simple reason for going large. "We were looking to achieve a new and bigger *Dizzy*. That pretty much was it," says programmer R Fred Williams. It was also to be the main attraction on a full-priced five-game compilation called *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*. This featured another adventure game called *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, with the other three games being puzzle/action titles: *Kwik Snax*, *Panic Dizzy* and either *Dizzy Down The Rapids* or *Bubble Dizzy* depending on the platform.

Big Red had already proven more than capable of making a good *Dizzy* game. The Oliver twins, who kick-started the series in 1987 with the release of *Dizzy: The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure*, passed on the baton to Big Red for the critically acclaimed fourth iteration, *Magicland Dizzy*, in 1990 while they focussed on creating games for the NES. It meant the Big Red team was entirely aware of the game and how important it was to publisher Codemasters.

"Philip and Andrew Oliver provided the design documents for *Magicland* and we used their engine to create it," says graphics artist Peter Ranson. "But it led to us creating *Dizzy Goes to Hollywood* which became *Seymour Goes To Hollywood* because the Olivers didn't want to put Dizzy in the real world. And, when there was talk of creating another *Dizzy* version after that, we got the

» [Amstrad CPC] A very special retro computer needed to be plugged into this screen!

Spellbound Dizzy
03 STARS
LIVES
ENERGY
WHEEEEEE!
pro boxing simulator is out now!!
battle your way through the toughest crowd of boxers you have seen
foul your opponent when the ref nods off!!
choose from a variety of 10 different moves!

» [Amiga] Messages were strewn throughout *Spellbound Dizzy*. Some were related to the games while some were adverts.

"IT LED TO US CREATING DIZZY GOES TO HOLLYWOOD WHICH BECAME SEYMOUR GOES TO HOLLYWOOD BECAUSE THE OLIVERS DIDN'T WANT TO PUT DIZZY IN THE REAL WORLD"
PETER RANSON

nod." *Spellbound Dizzy* was born. Unlike the Olivers, who made their *Dizzy* games on an Amstrad CPC, Big Red focussed on the Spectrum as its lead platform. "Two versions were made for the Spectrum: one for 48K and another for 128K which allowed for more graphical flourishes," says Paul Ranson who was Big Red's Boss.

Rather than use the Olivers' engine once again, however, Big Red put its own stamp on the game. Fred had written a new engine for *Seymour Goes To Hollywood* so *Spellbound Dizzy* was based on that. "Fred completely re-engineered the engine, effectively rewriting it from the ground up," Peter says. "Previously all of the landscapes were made up of individual elements which had to be stored somewhere and they took up memory. But Fred created a new system which was able to place edging around what was effectively a flood fill texture. By carving holes into each of the areas, we were able to have a very, very big map."

Fred said the new engine made improvements. "We had a flood-fill for the rocks but the main 'learning' thing from the Olivers original was the way the main sprite was run off interrupt, with seriously cunning XOR-based background restoration. It ran at a consistent speed even if there was a bunch of stuff slowing the rest of the scene down."

The sprite was also given a makeover. "We had an x-flippable Dizzy sprite rather ▶

CONVERSION CAPERS
THERE WERE SOME DIZZYING DIFFERENCES

ZX SPECTRUM

■ If you're going to play *Spellbound* on its lead platform, then be sure to try the 128K version rather than the 48K one. The developer made full use of the extra memory with improved graphics and animation. There is also more dialogue, making for a richer experience.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The CPC version (with 128K enhancements) is a Spectrum port but it looks better than previous *Dizzy* outings on the computer thanks to its more detailed graphics. They actually go beyond the four-colour palette of Mode 1 thanks to the use of the raster technique.

COMMODORE 64

■ There are two versions of *Spellbound Dizzy* for the Commodore 64: one is 'lite' with fewer screens and multiple bugs while the other is complete. There's some nice audio but it's quirky: items other than rocks can weigh Dizzy down and there's a long draw time.

AMIGA

■ As you'd expect, the Amiga version of *Spellbound Dizzy* has a very colourful, cartoon-like appearance. Ported by Optimus Software, it zips along at a nice pace – until you munch some fruit in which case you need to wait while Dizzy swallows it down.

ATARI ST

■ The Atari ST port was almost indistinguishable from the Amiga version other than having solid-colour backgrounds and music that – subjectively – sounded a little better. As with the C64 (full) and Amiga versions, there is no fall damage which made these ports much easier to play.

» [C64] Dizzy could survive underwater for a short spell but stay for longer and danger ensued.

DIZZYING DECISION

FIVE THINGS THAT ARE UNIQUE TO SPELLBOUND DIZZY

DIZZYING HEADACHES

When Dizzy fell from a great height in the other games in this series, he'd merely bounce and roll but in Spellbound Dizzy, he would land with a thud and nurse a sore head. In most of the versions, it also meant losing some energy.

WATER TIGHT

Without a rubber snorkel in *Treasure Island Dizzy*, our egg-shellent chum would drown when he encountered water. Not so in *Spellbound* where Dizzy was able to stay underwater for a short time (longer with an aqualung). He was able to grab flippers and swim as well.

FANTASTIC FOOD

Since energy levels were easily depleted, the developers ensured there was at least a way of replenishing them: by eating food! Fruit was strewn around screens and munching on one would boost energy levels by 25%. The facial expressions were also mega cute.

ANIMATED SETPIECES

Setpieces had never been attempted in a *Dizzy* game before and they helped bring *Spellbound* to life. It was thrilling to watch the minecart shoot down the track and fly through the air. It was also immensely fun to navigate the travel tunnels.

LARGER INVENTORY

In the first game, Dizzy could hold a single item. This increased to two in *Treasure Island Dizzy*, and finally three in *Fantasy World* and *Magicland Dizzy*. For *Spellbound*, two items could be carried at once until a bag was found, increasing it to four.

than one with separate moving-left and moving-right data using memory," Fred says. "The CPC got a proper masked sprite rather than something with green edges that he'd been for ages. The more compact map format meant we could squish extra stuff in and there were a whole bunch of things that were 128K-only."

In keeping with previous *Dizzy* games, *Spellbound* (which was originally going to be called *Mystic Kingdom Dizzy*) was to be steeped in fantasy. "We looked for consistency in the *Dizzy* universe – the fantasy world and nursery rhymes with the whole Ladybird-book, Disney-esque feel," Peter says. "The look and feel of the series had been fairly fixed by this point so all of the graphics and the individual components of those graphics were already set.

"When it came to translating that over to the next version of the game, I was quite familiar with those assets so the building of new materials was fairly straightforward. We came up with the notion of an underground adventure and it sort of spawned from there. I remember making sketches on paper, certainly of underground trees. I was making sure things had a sense of undergroundness to them so there were lots of things like crystals."

In this adventure, *Dizzy* once again found himself in a pickle. "The story was still 'Dizzy messed everything up so has to undo the mistakes," Fred says. In this case, Dizzy's friend Wizard Theodore had left his book of Really Powerful Skills lying around and one of them – A Really, Really Powerful Spell (That Shouldn't Be Read Out loud) – had been read out loud, casting Dizzy's Yolkfolk along with Wizard Theo into the underworld. The seven Yolkfolk could only be released by collecting 40 stars and finding an item that belonged to each of them. Doing so entailed bouncing back and forth and solving loads of puzzles.

"It was the puzzles that drove the development of these games," says Paul. "Ideas for the combination of elements that had to be collected and couriered to a character or situation were done in ad-hoc ways over lunch, down the pub or in chats with the guys when visiting Big Red." One thing's for sure, there was no shortage of ideas. It felt as if the team had put together a huge list of things they wanted to include and become carried away but they were heaps of fun.

Arguably the most memorable was the minecart ride – "clearly inspired by Indiana Jones," Paul says – which needed to be located and fixed (there was no brake and the track was damaged). "It was a work of hard-coded genius; an epic

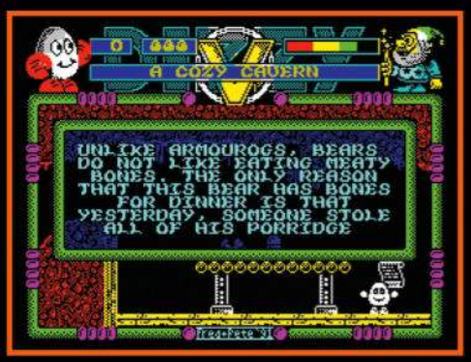
» [C64] Ah, the Sandstone Quarry. A screen you will see again and again and again and again…

» [Amstrad CPC] As with most other *Dizzy* games, the Yolkfolk helped to bring the fantasy lands to life.

A SPARE ORE CRUSHER
"LEMMINGS" IS OUT ON THE ARCHIMEDES!!!!
(THIS ISN'T AN ADVERT: IT'S MORE AN EXCUSE AS TO WHY DIZZY V DIDN'T COME OUT IN OCTOBER!)

» [ZX Spectrum] Some of the dialogue couldn't fail to make you smile, created with tongues very firmly in cheek at times, we'd imagine.

» [Amiga] The 16-bit versions were coded by Shane O'Brien with graphics by Brian Hartley.


A COZY CAVERN
UNLIKE ARMOUROGS, BEARS DO NOT LIKE EATING MEATY BONES. THE ONLY REASON THAT THIS BEAR HAS BONES FOR DINNER IS THAT YESTERDAY, SOMEONE STOLE ALL OF HIS PORRIDGE

» [Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum] Some of the notices were funny, including this excuse for why *Spellbound Dizzy* was a little delayed, a little hello to a *Dizzy* fan and some commentary.

from Fred," says Paul. "In its way, it was also an epic scene for an 8-bit computer in general. It's hard to put the finger on who originated the idea but kudos to Pete and Fred for the energy applied to draw and code it."

> **"THE STORY WAS STILL 'DIZZY MESSED EVERYTHING UP SO HAS TO UNDO THE MISTAKES'"**
> **FRED WILLIAMS**

There were many more standout moments. "There was the whole Windy Chasm that needed Dizzy to be weighted with different rocks to get to specific levels," Paul recalls. "I also remember using a pot of pepper to make the whale sneeze to make a water spout and using a Sinclair ZX81 to turn on the substation. There were scales that would open a mystery door [scales that also needed heavy rocks].

"These ideas were the culmination of many different people's inspiration," Paul says. "There was a wicked sense of humour in the Big Red office as can be seen in the dialogue between the characters. This sense of fun pervaded everything we did and the things that made people laugh tended to be where energy was applied to the graphics and code."

Even so, some of the decisions ramped up the difficulty levels. Some of the much-needed stars, for example, were hidden and required gamers to move what appeared to be normal background objects such as handrails in order to see them. When leaping from a great height, Dizzy would also sustain damage, taking players by surprise.

There was a lot of toing and froing as well in order to collect and use rocks: Dizzy had to constantly move a trampette (no, us neither) from one place to another so that he could bounce high enough to get to the rocks' location. Each rock then needed to be carefully put down on a soft surface to avoid them shattering into tiny pieces – and those soft surfaces were difficult-to-reach clouds that Dizzy would fall through if he wasn't quick enough.

To make life more difficult, you'd sometimes need more than one rock at a time but Dizzy's bag could only carry two items at once (until a larger bag was found). "The rocks needed the inventory limitation for the puzzles and the limited inventory was pretty much Dizzy's thing," Fred says, by way of explanation. "I should point out, though, that Peter's original design included shortcuts so you didn't have to continually re-do the rock transportation thing. I can't remember why they didn't make it in."

Although much of the game followed a path laid down by the original *Dizzy* game, there were some other influences. Primarily, the game was inspired by the emerging consoles with Peter freely admitting he was jealous of developers who were creating games for the NES, SNES and Mega Drive. He wanted to give the games he was working on a console-like feel.

"I recall going to a party at the Oliver twins' house prior to me moving to Leamington Spa and they had a SNES with *Super Mario World*," he says. "I had an imported Genesis and an early version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* so a combination of seeing the characterisation of Sonic and then playing *Mario World* and thinking, 'Wow, this is incredible,' took the sense of run-and-jump to a new level with all of these different abilities."

Paul agrees. "That was a major influence: we had Dizzy do things such as eating apples for energy, swimming and going through travel tubes, all that sort of stuff. I wanted to see Dizzy as a lump in the pipes. On a Spectrum, this was something that the attribute colour system really made pop and it was a nod in the direction of *Mario* which everyone loved."

> "I HAD AN IMPORTED GENESIS AND AN EARLY VERSION OF SONIC THE HEDGEHOG SO A COMBINATION OF SEEING THE CHARACTERISATION OF SONIC AND THEN PLAYING MARIO AND THINKING, 'WOW, THIS IS INCREDIBLE'"
> FRED WILLIAMS

Big Red was also influenced by *Fantastic Dizzy*, the game the Olivers were creating for the NES. "There may have been some cross-pollination going on there," Pete explains. "We were working remotely from Codemasters but we'd occasionally go to the offices to see what they were getting up to. Ultimately, we were trying to maximise what we could do with the Spectrum. We wanted to make a big impact."

As such, Peter spent a lot of time creating the animations. "You can see the origins of this in *Panic Dizzy* which I programmed with him," says Paul. "The swimming animations (with and without the snorkel) in *Spellbound Dizzy* were a work of art, more so if you think back to the tech available to animators at the time. They were also hand drawn and they became the basis of the graphics for the 16-bit versions too."

But although Fred was inspired by an action adventure game well-known for its realistic gravity and physics engine – "I'd recently played *Exile* on the BBC Micro before starting this game," he says – *Dizzy* still remained simplistic. "There was no physics in *Dizzy*. It was all fakery," he says. "The game would look for what you were carrying and that would determine the height you'd go and how far you could fly."

Likewise, there was no general puzzle-scripting going on either. "It was just code. If you used an object in a certain place, a thing would happen. But if you want to get all

» [Amstrad CPC] As always, the gameplay primarily revolved around spying a problem, finding an item and using it to resolve the issue.

» [Amstrad CPC] Theo has learned his lesson – Dizzy does tend to get himself in a mess. But therein sets the mission.

techy, the Z80's IX and IY registers allowed for a degree of 'this is the object instance that the code's looking at', which in these C/C++ days amounts to being 'a pointer'."

Still, having 128K to play around with made a big difference on the game. "We went to town with *Spellbound* in the 128K version," Fred says. "Pretty much everything was 128K-enhanced such as extra text in conversations and background-restore as conversations progressed. We also had extra animation frames such as all of the fish and Dizzy with a snorkel. Sadly, we broke the 48K leprechaun in the first release. It needed more testing."

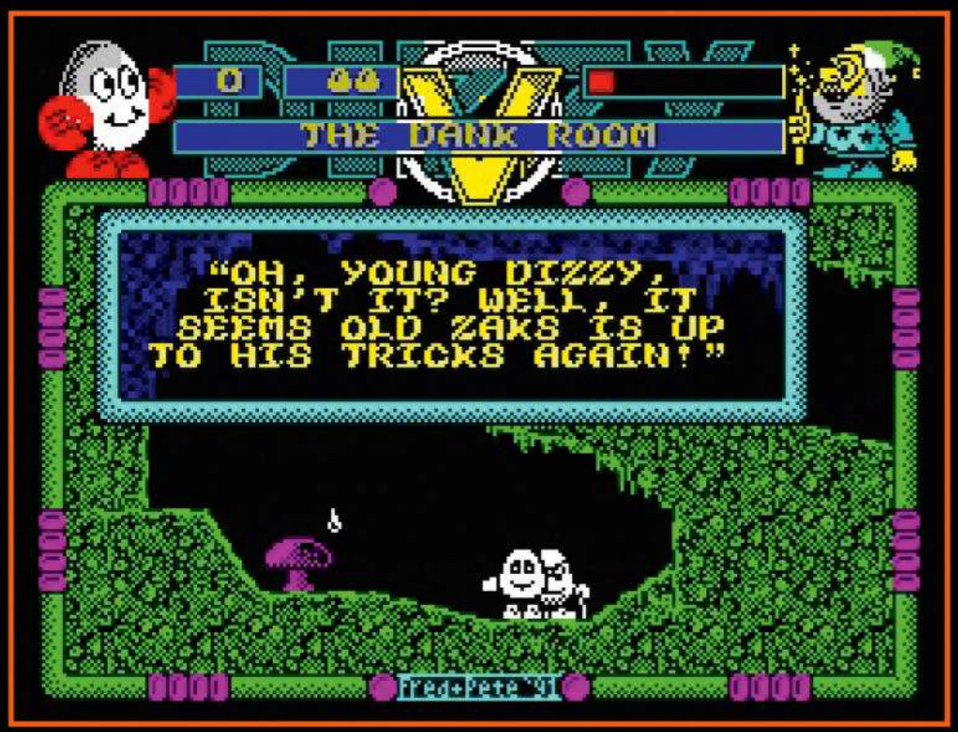
» [ZX Spectrum] The fantasy setting requires some fantasy characters hence the meeting of a leprechaun.

» [ZX Spectrum] Unless you had a very keen sense of direction, *Spellbound Dizzy* was a mapper's dream.

As well as the Amstrad CPC, the game was also ported to the Commodore 64, Amiga and Atari ST – the latter three by a different team. Finding teams to create them wasn't easy, Paul says. "The C64 version – crikey, what a shit show that was," but it was necessary due to a lack of time and experience. "I didn't have experience creating 16-bit artwork at the time," Peter says.

Spellbound Dizzy, which was also given a standalone budget release, went down well with critics, however, as did *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, come to that.

"*Prince Of The Yolkfolk* used the old *Dizzy* engine and we created it at the same time – it took me a weekend to design from start to finish and we managed to write it in literally a few weeks", Peter reveals. Even so, Paul still has one big regret. "It's a shame that the effort made by the Big Red team was not as recognised as it should have been," he laments. "While *Spellbound Dizzy* was a success, it was in a very small domain because the Spectrum and Amstrad market was dying at this point. It could have been so much bigger if it had been released a couple of years earlier."



» [ZX Spectrum] As always, it's great to have a chat with members of the Yolkfolk.

CHEATERS DO PROSPER

MOST PLAYERS ENJOYED GETTING A HELPING HAND WITH BIG RED'S GAME

Aside from being tempted to phone the *Dizzy* helpline (and incur the wrath of whoever was paying the bill), magazines would, as with so many games, frequently print hints and tips and include maps to assist fellow players. But what was arguably even more helpful was a built-in cheat code for the Spectrum and Amstrad versions, allowing you to effectively crack open the game.

It allowed players to start a game of *Spellbound Dizzy*, press Q to quit then type IWANTANOMLETTE. After restarting the game, players could press C to call up a menu that allowed them to quickly move from one location to another, access all of the game's items, gain extra lives and bag five stars at a time (something that was essential for rescuing the Yolkfolk).

There was also another bonus, too. Only by using the cheat do you realise that it's only possible to legitimately visit 104 of the rooms. Room 105 is actually accessible only by using the cheat and navigating there – a fact stated when you arrive. "Hi to 'Bug Hunter' Dave, to all the reviewers, and to those who've found the cheat mode!" it says.

THE 105TH ROOM!
WELCOME TO ROOM 105!,
(IT'S ONLY HERE TO MAKE UP THE NUMBERS!)
HI TO "BUG HUNTER" DAVE, TO ALL THE REVIEWERS, AND TO THOSE WHO'VE FOUND THE CHEAT MODE!

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

GAMES STARRING LIVING TOYS

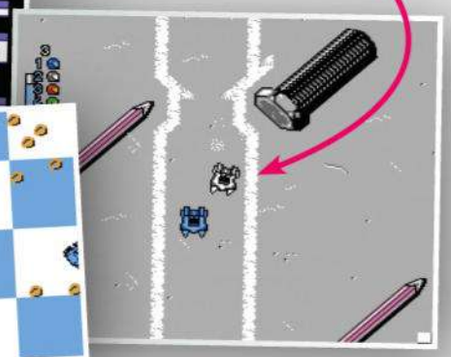
When the kids are done for the day, the toys shall play – and these toys certainly get up to some mischief. Just to be clear, rather than simply being based on toy lines, we're talking about games in which the toys come to life in our world and are depicted as toys

TOY BIZARRE

■ Though most of the games on this list put you in the role of a good toy, in this Commodore 64 platformer you play as Merton the factory maintenance man, rounding up rebellious clockwork contraptions. This game has been largely forgotten despite being rather enjoyable, but its programmer Mark Turmell would go on to greater fame working on games like *Smash TV* and *NBA Jam*.

MICRO MACHINES

■ If this wasn't the first game you thought of upon seeing this page, we'd be surprised – many a multiplayer night has been given over to the dinky drivers. The series has visited just about every part of the house in the years since the original NES game first launched in 1991, from staple environments like breakfast tables and bathtubs to gardens, ponds and pool tables.



THE SECRET ISLAND OF DR QUANDARY

■ That dastardly Dr Quandary has gone too far – after inviting you to play a carnival shooting gallery, he's transformed you into the doll you won. Unless you solve his puzzles, you'll never get your real body back. Edutainment is normally a term that makes us run for the hills, but this PC outing is a credit to the genre thanks to its engaging premise.

CLOCKWORK KNIGHT

■ For Sir Pepperouchau, rescuing the clockwork fairy princess Chelsea is a matter of life or death – without her voice to wake them up, the toys in their house will remain inanimate forever. This Saturn launch title was standard fare in gameplay terms, a 2D platformer in the mould of those that were so popular on 16-bit consoles, but it was a graphical treat in its day.

TOY STORY

■ Living toys managed to breathe new life into ageing 16-bit consoles in the mid-Nineties, as Traveller's Tales delivered not only a classic film licence but a masterclass in technical trickery. Woody, Buzz and pals look fantastic as pre-rendered sprites, the platforming challenges are imaginative and there are plenty of diversions such as first-person sections and racing stages, ensuring that the game remains interesting throughout.

SUPER SMASH BROS

■ Hands up – who genuinely remembers the original premise behind this series? Though Nintendo has downplayed this in recent games, go back and watch the intro to the N64 game and you'll see it's all about someone playing with toys. The set dressing is just the product of an active imagination, which runs out just in time to make the intro's giant hand the final boss.

TOY COMMANDER

■ Old favourite Huggy Bear is jealous of owner Andrew Guthy's new toys. So far, so *Toy Story,* but Huggy initiates a revolution that engulfs the whole house in chaos. Your job is to use a variety of vehicles to take back control in military-style operations, races, rescue missions and more. This Dreamcast cult classic even has an exclusive Christmas demo level starring a jetpack-wearing Santa.

ARMY MEN: AIR ATTACK

■ It's no wonder the *Army Men* series became a punchline – 3DO managed to pump out 18 of them in less than five years, most of which ranged from average to atrocious. However, this game and its sequel bucked the trend, drawing from EA's *Strike* series to provide a better standard of miniature military action. It's a tad easy but surprisingly decent, particularly on the N64.

BREVER

ULTIMATE GUIDE

ALESTE

WHEN ALESTE CAME TO THE WEST UNDER THE NAME POWER STRIKE, A NEW ERA FOR 2D SHOOTERS DAWNED. WITH ITS RELEASE, DEVELOPER COMPILE ASSERTED THAT SHMUPS COULD AND SHOULD BE FASTER, MORE AGGRESSIVE AND BUSIER. THIRTY-FIVE YEARS ON THE LEGACY OF THAT MINDSET CAN STILL BE FELT

WORDS BY WILL FREEMAN

» [Master System] In its best moments *Power Strike* brings impressive detail. Not bad for a 1988 Master System release.

When Japanese developer Compile debuted its latest shooting game in 1988, it hit on themes that almost feel uncomfortably familiar today.

The game was *Power Strike*; a title that did impressive things in pushing its genre forward, while spinning a yarn formed from threads focussed on environmental decline, rogue computer intelligence gone awry, frightening advances in military technology, and the dangers of trying to manipulate and control too much of the world around us.

> "WHERE POWER STRIKE REALLY PUSHED THINGS WAS WITH ITS POWER-UP SYSTEM"

Compile's cautionary tale of environmental maintenance supercomputer DIA51 turning on humanity and letting our climate cook isn't wildly deep or elaborate – after all, narrative in shmups is mostly about establishing a hint of context and flavour before setting off into the bullet storm, where the players carve their own stories of high skill and dramatic scrapes with death. But the foresight *Power Strike* demonstrated – albeit fleetingly – played perfect partner to its somewhat visionary take on what 2D shooters could be.

Before digging into the game *Power Strike* is, a quick clarification of its potentially confusing history (for more on the sprawling series that followed, check the What's In A Name? panel on page 62). *Power Strike*, then, was first released to the Sega Mark III and Master System in Japan in February 1988 under its original moniker *Aleste*. It would soon be ported to the MSX2 computer in the summer of that same year, beefing the game up with two additional stages, easier difficulty and an expanded plot with cutscenes. By December 1988 the warmly received shooter finally made its way to US and European stores under the name *Power Strike*. Gone were the additional stages and new romantic plot elements of the MSX2 outing, with Western gamers essentially getting a port of the original Master System build. Curiously, in the US, *Power Strike* was initially available exclusively through mail order, and only a very limited retail release followed. That mail-order edition in particular now easily

E-FAU

Power Strike

STREI

» [MSX2] Some sprites on the MSX2 version had terrible flicker, making your ship appear to be invisible.

RUGG

» [Master System] Even the opening stage of *Power Strike* is bristling and busy.

clears the £250 mark in the collector space; an impressive sum for a Western port, but still a way off the £1,000-plus prices a complete MSX2 version presently courts.

It might be tempting to consider that MSX2 version as *Power Strike*'s defining release; it coming with all those enticing extras. But that port also brought excessive flickering and slowdown that – while deliberate or appreciated in many shmups – didn't sit well in this particular case. Simply put, moments in *Aleste* on the MSX2 slow down far too much. As such, it is the Master System build that is the better release, right down to crisper, more vibrant visuals and an overall superior feel of flow and action. However, this does mean you miss the MSX2 release of *Aleste*'s striking opening city level. It's a stage with an enticing sense of Eighties Japanese cool, and one of the more detailed; but it perhaps pushes the length of the game a little far relative to its

» [Master System] You get occasional moments of peace in *Power Strike* – at least in the transition between stages.

» [MSX2] Over on MSX2, *Power Strike* is known as *Aleste* – and includes an extra city stage as its opener.

» [Master System] *Power Strike*'s main weakness might be its run of very similar Ground Base bosses.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

CLARIFYING THE DETAIL OF THE ELABORATE ALESTE SERIES

1988's *Aleste* – aka *Power Strike* – is just the start of an elaborate, spiralling series of shooters mostly created by Japanese studio Compile.

After the success of the actual first *Power Strike* game, Compile released *Aleste Gaiden* to the MSX2 in 1989, on its *Disk Station* publication, which brought playable new games to gamers on a monthly basis. That same year *Aleste 2* also landed on the MSX2, introducing recurring series character Ellinor, and a technical improvement on its system forebear.

The following year *Musha Aleste* – aka *MUSHA* – debuted on Sega's Mega Drive, bringing some very nice visuals and vibrant gameplay, but less than dazzling sales, thanks to a crowded shooting marketplace. SNES owners, meanwhile, were treated to the truly superb *Super Aleste* – aka *Space Megaforce* – two years later in 1992, which may be the best *Power Strike* game there is. Next, also in 1992, Sega CD owners could get their hands on the sequel to *Musha Aleste*, *Dennin Aleste* – aka *Robo Aleste* in the West – which somewhat split critics across the globe.

Over on the Game Gear, meanwhile, there were three games in the *GG Aleste* series, coming out in 1991, 1993 and 2020 respectively, bringing a lot of action and personality to the system's diminutive screen.

That 2020 version was made from scratch by porting house M2, and is also available on its Switch and PS4 compilation *Aleste Collection*. M2 also made the arcade-exclusive 2021 title *Senjin Aleste*, which brought a little bullet-hell energy, and really deserves a console port.

As for the future, M2 is working on *Aleste Branch*, which is currently in a playable state, but without confirmation of release year or final platform.

» [MSX2] As well as sprite flicker and the extra stage, *Aleste* on MSX2 added a romantic backstory.

» [Master System] Also on the Master System, *Power Strike II* levelled up the visual flair yet another notch.

genre's need for punch and momentum. Yes, a shmup really can become 'too long' in times that might fill a single level in other genres.

Compile itself is perhaps best-known for creating the celebrated block-puzzling series *Puyo Puyo*, which debuted in 1991. By the mid-Nineties, *Puyo Puyo* reportedly became the team's main focus, and understandably so. It was a triumphant success, and today, long after Compile's 2003 demise, still thrives as a Sega property. However, Compile had made its name with 2D shooters, starting with a game that it's tempting to consider as the real first game in the *Power Strike* series.

***Zanac* arrived for the MSX and Famicom Disk System in 1986, asserting a new potential for shooters to be fast, ordnance dense, and aggressive.** It borrowed several elements from early shooters, and in particular Namco's *Xevious*, which was not only one of the very first vertically scrolling shmups, but also one of the earliest games to introduce boss fights, pre-rendered graphics and even storyline. The new standards and ideas Namco's shooter introduced ultimately shifted the genre into its golden age; a period defined by innovation and advancements in shmup design and the technical muscle that powered them.

Compile's *Zanac* team appeared to take the fundamentals of *Xevious* and double down on its ambition, setting a standard for what the

genre's new epoch could deliver, with more nuance, complexity and pace. Indeed, the same year *Power Strike* was released, Compile's devs worked on *Xevious: Fardraut Saga*; another shmup where a supercomputer decides it's had enough of mankind. We'll save tucking into all of *Zanac*'s inner workings here, because it is so similar to *Power Strike* things might get repetitive. Simply put, *Zanac* feels very much like a wonderful prototype for *Power Strike*; a game that feels remarkably fresh and contemporary here in 2023, some 35 years on.

To a degree, *Power Strike* is generic – though in truth it is a game that helped establish the genre mould rather than simply obediently conform to it. Across six scrolling stages and an additional secret level that speeds up the first, you must dodge and weave through clouds of bullets, downing enemies and wrangling with bosses until you make it to the end. Very much in the military sci-fi realm, it brings fairly impressive detail and style for its era, even if it was ultimately surpassed on that front with 1993's Master System title *Power Strike II*; the first game in the series to be officially based on *Power Strike* rather than *Aleste*.

On release, the original *Power Strike* presented a tantalising future for shooters, where things were more dynamic, frenetic and tightly packed. It offered a wild ride for players used to its forebears, and presented a new kind of challenge where screens were remarkably busy, pushing players to develop strategies and approaches that would increasingly become stalwarts of genre mastery. Things moved fast and tight, and rave reviews poured in as critics discovered the thrill contained within.

> "SIMPLY PUT, ZANAC FEELS VERY MUCH LIKE A WONDERFUL PROTOTYPE FOR POWER STRIKE"

***Power Strike* insists you cover the entire screen estate, often pushing you right to the top of the screen to seize a power-up, or leading you to sweep back and forth from left to right as you juggle staving off the attacks that come at you from each side of the screen.** It's rather easy to get stuck on one side of the playing field, leaving the other side to swell with an enemy populace, making you fight to move back and forth, and rarely leaving much time for sitting in the middle covering everything. That's now something

PLAYTODAY

INSIDE M2'S REMARKABLE SHOTTRIGGERS ALESTE COLLECTION

Japanese porting house M2 has long been known for the quality of its work. However, its shmup-focussed *ShotTriggers* series takes that effort to a new level, with a steady flow of incredibly good ports of famous shmups, each typically coming with numerous different versions, and handsome archival extras and customisation settings. With *ShotTriggers'* entry *Aleste Collection*, M2 went especially far in its pursuit of quality.

Available for PS4 and Switch, *Aleste Collection* brings precise ports of *Aleste* and *Power Strike*, plus the Western Master System game *Power Strike II*, and three Game Gear entries from the series. There's the original *GG Aleste*, first released for Sega's handheld in 1991, which does a decent enough job of reworking the original version for the Game Gear's modest screen. There's also the 1993 release *GG Aleste 2*, confusingly also titled *Power Strike II* in the West, though it's nothing like a port of the Master System release that carried that title.

And you get *GG Aleste 3*, which M2 built from scratch for the Game Gear for the compilation, using staff that had worked on Compile shooters like *Blazing Lazers*, and even talent from the genre heavyweight that is *Battle Garegga*.

The emphasis on the Game Gear versions, however, does come at the expense of getting the SNES wonder that is *Super Aleste*, and the beautiful Mega Drive series title *Musha Aleste*.

» [PS4] The series ports that come with M2's *Aleste* collection offer the most convenient official way to play today.

» [PS4] A special edition of *Aleste Collection* even came with a Game Gear Micro for *GG Aleste 3* play.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
MNC-NUI

BOSS RUSH

POWER STRIKE'S DEFINING BOSSES AND HOW TO BEAT THEM

STAGE 1 GROUND BASE

■ Most of *Power Strike*'s 17 bosses take the form of large ground installations. Master the first, and the rest will fall.

How To Beat Them: You can rely on bullet cancelling a great deal here, so try to brave staying straight in the middle while holding your ground.

STAGE 3 GROUND BASE

■ Things start to pick up in Stage 3, with bigger Ground Base bosses that require a little more work to defeat.

How To Beat Them: Adopting a strategy you'll want to apply to most bosses from this point on, focus laser-type shots on one bullet spawn point at a time.

STAGE 6 TILE DROP GROUND BASE

■ By now many bosses have required a very similar strategy – but this stage 6 mid-boss has a trick up its sleeve.

How To Beat Them: Take out the bullet spawn points as usual. When they're done, get ready to dash to one side to avoid the falling tiles.

STAGE 6 FINAL GAME BOSS

■ Bosses are actually one of *Power Strike*'s easier enemies – until you get to the final one at Stage 6.

How To Beat Them: Don't stop moving, and do keep persisting. Keep an eye out for the popcorn enemies that charge you too. It goes down eventually.

STAGE 0 GROUND BASE

■ Beat *Power Strike* and you open up the secret Stage 0; a faster, more frenetic version of Stage 1.

How To Beat Them: Things are quick and gaudy here. You can adopt the Stage 1 boss strategy, but be ready to leap suddenly to one side to escape bullets.

» [Master System] Larger enemies like Trailer-Rugg aren't bosses in a traditional sense, but bring some well needed variety to the action.

» [Master System] Complete *Power Strike* and you open up Stage 0. Clear that and you leap right ahead to stage 6.

COMPILE CLASSICS

A LOOK OVER THE OTHER COMPILE SHOOTING GAMES

FINAL JUSTICE

■ Arriving in 1985, Compile's *Final Justice* was one of the team's first console releases, and an early MSX shooting game. It certainly feels primitive compared to the development team's later works, but there's a fun game in there that hints at the energy future Compile shmups would offer.

ZANAC

■ Coming out two years before *Power Strike*, *Zanac* offers such a similar proposition it can be considered something of a prototype, or even as *Power Strike 0*. Fast, intense, and stylish, it's an essential shmup, and available in many revisions on the PS1 *Zanac X Zanac* compilation.

increasingly common in the extended bullet-hell era, where a steady sweep from left to right and back so often helps you manipulate and manage the most testing bullet patterns and enemy formations.

But where *Power Strike* really pushed things was with its power-up system, which while not inherently complex, deeply shifted how to approach downing the spawnings of DIA51. *Power Strike* wasn't the first 2D shooter to let player pilots explore intricate weapon-switching systems; *Gradius* (aka *Nemesis*) had famously already done that in early 1985, with a system that let players trade in different numbers of power-up items for different abilities on the fly.

Power Strike takes a slightly different approach that ensures you never rest on your laurels or lean too heavily on a favoured or particularly strong weapon. It's a recipe for dramatic playthroughs, bringing a nice variety in the experience you have in each credit put in. Ultimately, you are granted a standard shot and a special extra second weapon. The first shot offers infinite ammunition, starting as something of a peashooter, and is upgradable through collecting high numbers of Power Chips. Familiar shmup business on the main canon then.

The second weapon, meanwhile, comes in many different flavours. Pick up one of eight numbered Special Power items, and you adopt the corresponding weapon's power. There are directional shots, defensive shield weapons, high-powered central lasers, homing energy balls and more, all requiring a slightly different strategic approach. Each can be upgraded by picking up additional Special Power items of the same number, but you won't often find more than two of the same type together. Instead, you're considerably more likely to keep changing between Special Powers, adapting how you play live. That's because, while each firepower option technically has no ammo limit, they are only available for a set period. Let the timer run to zero, and you revert back to having the most basic Special Weapon – a shot that follows your ship's movement speed – at its weakest power. Next in the core loop of the weapon gameplay comes dashing to find any Special Power item that might suit your preferences – or a period of surviving with your peashooter front gun and a special shot that demands particularly high skill.

In the end *Power Strike*'s blend of distinct gameplay, impressive pace and dynamism, higher bullet and enemy numbers, and crisp, detailed visuals made it a hit with a legacy. *Power Strike* has surely influenced hundreds of shmups that followed, either very directly, or through its broad impact on the shooting game genre. Today you can most readily access it officially via M2's remarkable *Aleste Collection* on Switch and PS4, which includes both the original *Power Strike* and *Aleste*, plus several more series entrants (see panel Play Today).

And you very much should play *Power Strike* today, not just because it is one of the vast shmup genre's most significant works, but because it's still delightfully fun and exciting all these decades on.

> "POWER STRIKE HAS SURELY INFLUENCED HUNDREDS OF SHMUPS THAT FOLLOWED"

» [Master System] In moments *Power Strike* brings an impressively dark, grotesque atmosphere.

» [Master System] In case you get carried away, at its close *Power Strike* reminds you it definitely isn't real.

BLAZING LAZERS

Known as *Gunhed* in Japan, *Blazing Lazers* stands out as one of Compile's most popular PC Engine games. Released in 1989, just a year after *Power Strike*, it demonstrates a notable leap forward in visual detail, perhaps asserting that the studio had found its ideal platform in NEC's tiny powerhouse.

SEIREI SENSHI SPRIGGAN

Returning to PC Engine shooters with *Seirei Senshi Spriggan*, Compile opted for a CD-ROM² release for its excellent-looking shmup. Built by many of the Compile staff who had worked on *Power Strike*, it's fairly distinct in the genre for adopting a sci-fi fantasy theme.

SYLPHIA

Even more thematically distinct than *Seirei Senshi Spriggan*, *Sylphia* (1993) is set in the classical Greek era, and is a work of heroic fantasy. Pushing the CD-ROM² format impressively, it found a mixed reception with critics. Ultimately, *Sylphia* would be Compile's last shooter until its 2001 *Zanac X Zanac* compilation.

Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis

THE COUPLE THAT PLAYS TOGETHER, STAYS TOGETHER

» PC » 1992 » LUCASARTS

I've always enjoyed LucasArts' adventure games, and *Fate Of Atlantis* starts off brilliantly, with the famous archaeologist bumbling his way through Barnett College's archives in search of a small statue. It not only highlights the excellent voical work by Doug Lee, who does a canny Ford impression, but also gives you a good indication of the humour that will follow as Indy goes on his epic quest to find the fabled lost city of Atlantis.

Although Melanie has never been a big gamer, she certainly took an interest in anything that had cost us a lot of money, which meant she took a lot of interest in our first PC. When she wasn't using it to send emails, she'd join me for the odd gaming session. Although she had no interest in the likes of *Duke Nukem 3D* or Doom, she did enjoy the few adventure games I owned, and she particularly enjoyed *Fate Of Atlantis*. In fact it was one of the few games she'd attempt to boot up without me being around, meaning I'd often come home from work to find her stumped on a puzzle.

I've mentioned before how she called me at work (back when you had to go to reception to receive personal calls) when she had figured out a particularly mind-bending puzzle. It's a lovely memory, and I can still hear the excitement in her voice, because she was so pleased that she'd figured it out before I did. We eventually made our entire way through *Fate Of Atlantis* and to the best of my knowledge it remains the only adventure game we've ever completed together.

Now both our kids are at work and university respectively, we've got a lot more spare time together to enjoy ourselves. We were planning to play through *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, but the discovery of the excellent *Marcella* on ITVX has put that on the backburner. Maybe I can use Indy's greatest digital adventure to coax her back out of retirement and join me for another gaming session.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

JAMES POND II

CODENAME ROBOCOD

» [Amiga] Surely everyone remembers the game's cheat feature – Cake, Hammer, Earth, Apple, Tap? It's up there with the Konami code.

AS PLATFORMING HEROES GO, FEW ARE AS SMART, AS SKILLFUL, AND AS SLIPPERY AS JAMES POND, VECTORDEAN'S AQUATIC AGENT. RETRO GAMER PARTIES LIKE IT'S CHRISTMAS 1991 AS IT REVISITS ROBOCOD, THE SEQUEL THAT STRETCHED POND'S APPEAL BEYOND ALL EXPECTATIONS

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

Remember *Thing On A Spring*? Chris Sorrell does. The creator of the *James Pond* trilogy was a Commodore 64 fan growing up, and Gremlin's distinctive platformer, which was set in a surreal toy factory, would prove to be a huge influence on the second game in the series, *RoboCod*.

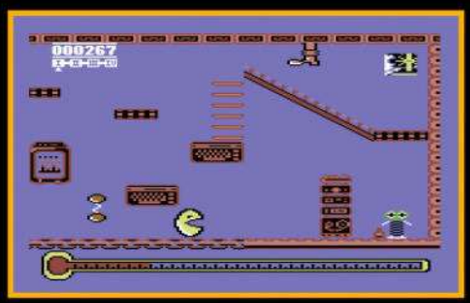
"I wanted to revisit one of my childhood favourites, *Thing On A Spring*," Chris told **Retro Gamer**, back in 2007. "That set me off thinking about Santa's toy factory having been taken over by an evil *Bond*-style villain called Dr Maybe. It was a crazy convergence of ideas and influences." Indeed, *RoboCod* was a series of spoofs layered on top of each other for maximum lampoonery, with a cloying Christmas theme and a chocolate biscuit (Penguin) promotion thrown in for good measure. In the first game, Pond was an 'underwater agent', working for the espionage agency FI5H.

For the sequel, he was upgraded to become part agent, part android, all cod. He could now operate on land as well as in water, and his unique Expandosuit let him stretch his body to ridiculous lengths. The sequel's ambitions expanded in line with Pond's new suit. The original game, which was released in November 1990 (and inspired by another C64 game, Graftgold's *Gribbly's Day Out*), was a solid swim-'em-up where Pond had to complete a dozen different missions. *RoboCod* followed just 12 months later, but it was a significant step up. Gone were the restricted underwater environments, replaced by an interconnected network of vast, cavernous stages. This was platforming writ large.

"IT WOULD BE A DISSERVICE TO WRITE OFF ROBOCOD AS A MARIO WANNABE"

The game was developed for the Amiga but the influence of console platformers was obvious. "*Super Mario World* gave me many late nights during *RoboCod*'s development," Chris admitted to us. "It totally redefined my expectations of the depths a platformer could offer." Some of that Nintendo magic rubbed off on Chris, particularly the marriage of cutesy graphics and tricky challenges. *RoboCod* also featured a world map of sorts, with each of the game's nine themed stages accessible via doors in the factory's snowy exterior, plus many other *Mario* tropes.

» [Amiga] The tone is perfectly set with a cute cartoon opening… before shameless PRODUCT PLACEMENT ruins the mood!



» [C64] It's easy to see the influence Gremlin's *Thing On A Spring* had on *RoboCod*.

SANTA CLAUS

POND IN PLANE

» [Amiga] As novel enemies go, what can top a double-decker bus that spits out deadly handbag-waving grannies?

TERRIBLE TRAIN

» [Amiga] The factory exterior hides a neat secret stash – if you know how to access it.

» [Amiga] It's always worth checking behind things, just in case they lead somewhere special…

» [Amiga] The 1200 version includes five new stages, including this one you really can't miss, right at the beginning of the game.

▶ Yet it would be a disservice to write off *RoboCod* as a *Mario* wannabe. The game had a lot of its own ideas, energy and charm, and there was absolutely nothing pretentious about it. In fact, the game was pleasingly unpolished in places, and you can guarantee that some of Steve Bak's level designs wouldn't pass muster with Shigeru Miyamoto. Inside Santa's factory, it wasn't always a case of heading right in search of the stage exit – sometimes you had to go up, down, or (shock) left. In one memorable example, on the very first stage, if you didn't fancy it, you could simply head left and exit in two seconds flat. Elsewhere, Pond could hop in a car, plane or bathtub! and scoot around the stages, accessing new areas and discovering hidden secrets. It's clear that the team at Vectordean were having a ball, throwing everything at the screen to see what would stick.

This genre-defying experimentation was a joy, but for most players *RoboCod*'s appeal lay in how it looked and sounded. Visually it was a riot of colour, featuring bright cartoon sprites and beautifully vibrant backgrounds (the Amiga's Copper graphics coprocessor was put to excellent use, filling empty spaces with lovely colour). Complimenting the visuals was Richard Joseph's infectious soundtrack, headlined by his jaunty parody of the ominous *RoboCop* theme.

It was these qualities that singled *RoboCod* out when it was reviewed by the gaming press. "The incredibly cute and colourful graphics capture the console feel perfectly," wrote *Amiga Format*'s Maff Evans, who awarded it 91%. "Back this up with some highly jolly tunes and the game is an audio-visual treat… one of the best platform games to ever appear on the Amiga." In *CU Amiga*, Steve Merrett gave it 93%, writing, "The look, the playability, the control over Pond himself… make *RoboCod* one of the best games I have ever played." *ACE* magazine's David Upchurch also awarded it 93% (or rather 934/1,000, but whatever, *ACE*), and reserved special praise for the game's creator. "What's so amazing is the fact the majority of the project was the responsibility of one man, Chris Sorrell," he wrote. "Doesn't it make you sick?" Well, no, but the game's super-

CONVERSION CAPERS

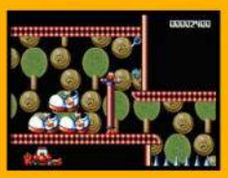
DID THE DIFFERENT VERSIONS SINK OR SWIM?

AMIGA

■ The original version is a classic Amiga platformer, dripping with character. Technically it's an excellent showcase for the base Amiga's graphic and sound capabilities. The full-screen, multi-direction scrolling is smooth and the tunes are top of the pops.

ATARI ST

■ Compromises had to be made to get the game running on the ST. The active screen area is almost a third smaller than the Amiga version and the backgrounds are mostly plain, yet the scrolling is still choppy. At least the game's wonderful sprite work is unaffected.



MEGA DRIVE

■ Developed alongside the Amiga version, the gameplay is a close match yet it's a downgrade in other ways. The backgrounds are blander (and, unwisely, tile foreground graphics), and the scrolling (while very smooth) is restricted on certain stages.

COMMODORE 64

■ The only 8-bit computer version and perhaps for good reason. The C64 delivers what looks like a VHS copy of the original, but the ambition is admirable and it is *RoboCod* (if you squint). Available on disk and – especially for masochists – tape too.

AMIGA CD32

■ Based on the enhanced Amiga 1200 version, which introduced even more colourful backgrounds and five new levels, this second update adds an animated opening and of course adapts the controls for the CD32 joypad. No more up to jump, thank the Lord.

PC

■ PC gaming had got its act together by the time this conversion appeared in 1993, so it's admirably close to the Amiga original in look and feel. The backgrounds are toned down, though still effective, and it includes the bonus stages from the Amiga 1200 version.

colourful visuals might after extended play.

While Chris was performing miracles on the Amiga, elsewhere at Vectordean Steve Bak ported it across to the Atari ST and Simeon Pashley handled the Mega Drive conversion (Chris has revealed that Simeon also contributed to the boss battles across all versions). The game proved to be a commercial hit on all three formats, eclipsing the original *James Pond* that had performed surprisingly well for publisher Millennium. This success led to more ▶

"THE SUCCESS LED TO MORE CONVERSIONS, WITH BIG NAMES LIKE EA, US GOLD AND OCEAN ALL INVOLVED"

BERTIE BASSETT

FISH TALES

WHAT POND DID BEFORE AND AFTER ROBOCOD

JAMES POND: UNDERWATER AGENT

■ Released in 1990, initially on the Amiga (pictured), the original game became a surprise hit and introduced the world to a slick new hero. Its appeal is limited if you return to it after playing the sequel, but it's still pleasing to play and provides plenty of challenge.

THE AQUATIC GAMES

■ While *RoboCod* was making a splash, Vectordean capitalised with this spin-off that dropped Pond and friends (the Aquabats) into a *Track & Field*-style game for the Mega Drive, SNES and Amiga (pictured). The events are all generally fun but it wears thin rather quickly.

JAMES POND 3: OPERATION STARFISH

■ Instead of a computer game imitating a console title, Pond's third mission was actually developed for the Mega Drive (pictured), and it largely succeeds in combining elements of *Mario* and *Sonic*. The series' trademark humour is retained, if not the inventiveness.

JAMES POND IN THE DEATHLY SHALLOWS

■ Despite the clever title, this 2011 iOS release is not a *Harry Potter* spoof. Rather, it's an unnecessary reimagining of the original game that suffers from poor touchscreen controls and ropey graphics. It has since been delisted on the App Store. Never mind.

ARCHIMEDES

■ This was the final home-computer conversion, released in 1994, and it's not a million miles off the Amiga version. The backgrounds are plain, but the scrolling is pretty smooth and all of those sprites have migrated over, along with the A1200 bonus stages.

SNES

■ Going up against the Mega Drive version, this one benefits from more colour, but it also relies on tiling to fill up the backgrounds, which can lead to confusion. In addition, there are regular instances of slowdown which is disappointing. It was released as *Super James Pond*.

GAME BOY

■ Oh boy. *RoboCod* is all about vast, colourful stages, so it would take something miraculous, something extraordinary to make it work on the Game Boy's tiny monochrome screen. This is not it. If Santa brought you this you'd question the very spirit of Christmas.

MASTER SYSTEM

■ Sega's trusty 8-bit console delivers a terrific version that plays to the strengths of the system. The backgrounds are simplified and some stages are missing (presumably to squeeze the game onto a 512KB cart), but the gameplay is untouched.

GAME GEAR

■ This is very similar to the MS version, as you'd expect, but it deserves its own entry as it adds some graphical flourishes, like falling snow outside the factory and some nice parallax effects. It still feels constricted on such a small screen, yet it's no Game Boy nightmare.

PLAYSTATION

■ Something fishy is afoot. The PlayStation version looks lovely and plays well, yet every level has been redesigned for no good reason. It's more of a remake than a conversion. The versions that followed – PS2, Switch etc – are all based on this one, so we can safely skip those.

» [Amiga] The game features some epic boss battles, including this final showdown with an embittered snowman.

» [Amiga] Pond turns soap dodger in one of the game's more inventive stages.

DEVELOPER Q&A

DEAN ASHTON UPGRADED ROBOCOD FOR THE AMIGA 1200 AND CD32

What was your opinion of the original Amiga version of *RoboCod*?
When I first saw it I was blown away, like many others were. It was the closest I'd seen to a console quality title on the Amiga. While working on the A1200 version I had a couple of trips to Vectordean where I was in full fanboy mode, but I think I managed to keep it together.

How did you become involved in upgrading the game?
Before I joined Millennium in April 1993, another programmer had been tasked with getting *RoboCod* to work on the Amiga CDTV, but he'd run into some difficulties, so it was passed over to me. At this time, everyone realised that there was no point in even considering CDTV as a viable platform. The A1200 was the new thing, so that became the target.

What was the basic brief for the A1200 version?
It needed to be able to run without taking over the entire machine. Like most games, the A500 version just loaded itself to a fixed address, wiping over the Amiga OS in the process. The goal for the A1200 version was for it to coexist with the Amiga OS, and as such allow for it to be run from the A1200 hard drive. This is why I changed the cheat code to 'OS FRIENDLY'. I was given just under three months to work on it, and if there was time left I was to look at minor visual enhancements and possibly include some additional levels.

"IT WAS THE CLOSEST I'D SEEN TO A CONSOLE QUALITY TITLE ON THE AMIGA" DEAN ASHTON

Evidently there was time to enhance the game?
Yes, I did mess around with the backgrounds, mostly to support the AGA chipset's increased colour resolution. Unfortunately I can't recall the origin story of the five additional levels that were added. I assume they were either leftovers from the original version, or extras that were generated as part of the SNES build that was also in development at Millennium.

What extra work was involved in updating the game a second time for the CD32?
Most of the game just worked, but management wanted some full-motion video and CD audio in there. For the FMV, they had an animation studio create the intro, leaving it to us to work out how we could play it back when the CD drive was only double speed, ie 300KB/s. It took days to process the animations and testing was incredibly painful. The CD32 wasn't even finished at the time, so we had to drive to Commodore UK in Maidenhead to burn CDs and test on an early version of the CD32 that was essentially the main board balanced in some sort of balsa wood frame. Thankfully, the CD audio bit was straightforward – which came with the bonus of working with another Amiga hero of mine, the late, and greatly missed, Richard Joseph.

» [CD32] Some silly cinematics were added to the disc version of the game.

BOSS RUSH

HOW TO BATTER THE GAME'S GUARDIANS

GIANT TEDDY

■ Sitting atop a spiky platform, this disgruntled bear drops from the top of the screen, trying to crush you beneath its bulk.

How To Beat Them: It lands in one of three places, so wait for it to fall then stomp its head. Pull down for double damage (this works on all bosses).

KILLER CAR

■ The boss drops down from above and bounces left and right, while spitting smaller cars at you from its gaping maw.

How To Beat Them: The smaller cars are a real pain, so avoid them by hopping up to the girder above and then dropping down onto the boss.

QUEEN OF HEARTS

■ The regal one floats around the screen, flinging killer playing cards at you like some *James Bond* villain. Her touch is deadly.

How To Beat Them: See the steps to the left and right? Use these to climb up and attack from above. You have to hit her squarely on the head to succeed.

TWIN BALLERINAS

■ There are two bosses and two Ponds? Actually it's just a mirror effect, which happens to make this tricky battle even trickier.

How To Beat Them: Avoid the boss by quickly jumping on either moving platform, then wait for her to land in the middle before slamming down.

MEGA SNOWMAN

■ This boss is snow joke. It will stomp around on the upper platform and attack by popping off its head and throwing it at you.

How To Beat Them: You can only inflict damage by hitting its body when its head comes off. When this happens, use the mini snowmen to leap up.

computer and console conversions, with big names like EA, US Gold and Ocean all involved. It seemed like everyone wanted a piece of Pond. Millennium itself later enhanced the game for the Amiga 1200 and CD32 machines, the latter featuring full-motion video and CD audio.

Chris, meanwhile, left *RoboCod* to others while he cooked up the next game in the series. The success of the previous games on consoles, coupled with the desire to challenge *Mario* and *Sonic*, led to Vectordean choosing the Mega Drive as the lead platform. Following what Chris described as a "relatively troubled development", *James Pond 3: Operation Starfish* was finally released in 1993, and later ported to the SNES, Gear Gear and Amiga 1200/CD32. A fourth game, a puzzle-platformer titled *James Pond 4: The Curse Of Count Piracula*, was mooted but cancelled at the concept stage. And it seemed that was the end of active service for Pond. All told, the series sold more than two million copies across all formats.

> "POND WOULD EVENTUALLY RETURN IN 2004, IN A VERSION OF ROBOCOD FOR THE PLAYSTATION"

Pond would eventually return in 2004, in a version of *RoboCod* for the PlayStation, courtesy of those old campaigners System 3. However, it appeared that during the intervening decade, someone had sneaked in and completely redesigned Santa's factory, changing all of the levels, making them more conventional, more monotonous. This 'modern twist' also added things like health bars for the bosses and included an opening FMV sequence that made the dodgy one on the CD32 version look like golden-era Disney. System 3 has since ported this version to multiple home and handheld systems, including most recently the Nintendo Switch, in 2019. They're all *RoboCod*, but not as you might remember it. The news is no better regarding other *Pond* projects. There was a forgettable iOS game from Gameware released in 2011, a failed Kickstarter for a *RoboCod* reboot in 2013, and nothing of substance since.

As *Pond*'s creator, Chris is not too concerned that the series has floundered since his stewardship ended. For him, *RoboCod* will always be a precious thing – not just the high point of the series, but the highlight of his career to date. "Of all the things I've worked on, I look back on *RoboCod* most fondly," he told us. "It was developed with a very modest budget and time frame – about nine months – and with relatively little commercial or creative pressure. It was just a few of us making the wackiest, most fun game we could."

» [SNES] Some of the stages, like this Liquorice Allsorts inspired one, are positively mouth-watering.

» [Mega Drive] This otherwise excellent console version does lack the original's vivid backgrounds.

Panasonic Q

» **MANUFACTURER:** Panasonic » **YEAR:** 2001
» **COST:** ¥39,800 (launch), £900+ (today, boxed), £600+ (today, unboxed)

Though the PlayStation 2 was capable of playing DVD movies as standard and the Xbox could play them with an inexpensive add-on, the GameCube had no such functionality. This was of little concern to Nintendo, which has rarely positioned its consoles as multimedia devices, but Panasonic felt that there was an opportunity to be seized upon. The company was already in partnership with Nintendo as the supplier of optical drives for the GameCube, so it was in a good position to negotiate the rights to manufacture an official variant of the console capable of DVD movie playback.

The Panasonic Q was introduced exclusively in Japan in December 2001, with its launch price being roughly 60% higher than the standard ¥25,000 of the regular GameCube, and ¥10,000 more than the dominant PS2. Perhaps due to this relatively high price, the console did not sell well and was discontinued after two years. The Panasonic Q is prized for its looks and unique functionality, but the consoles are not particularly reliable, so repairs and maintenance will be a high priority for current and aspiring owners.

Panasonic Q fact

■ Due to the non-standard shape of the Panasonic Q, the normal Game Boy Player will not fit the unit. A dedicated version for this console was produced in 2003 and is highly sought after.

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT IBM GEKKO POWERPC CPU (486 MHZ)

RAM: 24MB 1T-SRAM MAIN MEMORY, 3MB 1T-SRAM GRAPHICS CACHE, 16MB DRAM I/O BUFFER FOR AUDIO AND DVD DRIVE

GRAPHICS: ARTX ATI FLIPPER CUSTOM GPU (162 MHZ), 6-20 MILLION POLYGONS PER SECOND IN GAME CONDITIONS (EFFECTS INCLUDING TEXTURES, LIGHTING, FOGGING, Z-BUFFERING, ALPHA BLENDING)

AUDIO: 8CM NINTENDO GAMECUBE DISC (1.5GB), GAME BOY, GAME BOY COLOR, GAME BOY ADVANCE ROM CARTRIDGES (UP TO 256 MEGABIT, VIA OPTIONAL GAME BOY PLAYER)

STORAGE: NINTENDO GAMECUBE MEMORY CARD (UP TO 8MB, OPTIONAL)

ESSENTIAL GAME

Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader

If you're having a big weekend in, one of the things you could choose to do is a multimedia *Star Wars* marathon, covering both the movies and the games. While just about any console that plays DVDs offers a good option for this, the GameCube does offer one of the very best around in the form of *Rogue Leader*. Once you're done watching the Rebel Alliance blowing up the Death Star, you can give it a go yourself and feel like a real Jedi master when you eventually succeed.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN
AMOS

THE MAKING OF COMANCHE MAXIMUM OVERKILL

TODAY'S COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES VERGE ON THE PHOTOREALISTIC, SOMETHING THAT WAS A LONG WAY OFF SOME 30 YEARS AGO. BUT IN 1992, THERE WAS ONE GAME THAT GAVE US A RARE GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE OF 3D GRAPHICS

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NOVALOGIC
- **DEVELOPER:** NOVALOGIC
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PLATFORM:** PC
- **GENRE:** ACTION FLIGHT SIMULATOR

At the beginning of the Nineties, not many people had NovaLogic on their radar. The company, founded by John Garcia in 1985, first converted arcade titles such as *Bubble Bobble* and *Arkanoid* to IBM PCs and Apple computers, and created decent games like the submarine simulator *Wolfpack* (1990) and *The Rocketeer* (1991). Not exactly mind-blowing. But then came the 1992 ECTS in London, and what ran on a CRT monitor at the small NovaLogic booth left the entire audience both speechless and depressed, it was *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*.

Why was that? Flight simulators of the time had the problem that they basically looked like nothing, especially at a low altitude – untextured polygonal surfaces are not good at creating a realistic landscape feel. *Comanche* took care of exactly that problem, thanks to Kyle Freeman, the game's sole developer. "Kyle developed a unique bitmap effect: he took a tiny image of a woman's face, repeated it in 3D space, and gave each pixel its own Z coordinate," NovaLogic founder John Garcia tells us about the humble beginnings of *Comanche*'s groundbreaking 3D technology. "Applying a sine-wave function made it appear like a flag waving in the wind. Later, those coordinates were replaced with digital elevation maps, enabling real-time renderable terrains." That wasn't all though. "The first demo halfway through development had you shooting green balloons, because I was using a text based 3D renderer to make the sprites and entering a sphere into the text file was easy," Kyle adds.

The most important factor in this calculation is called voxel, which is a combination of volume and pixel (see What Is A Voxel?). A landscape built from them allowed for hundreds of times more detail than the most advanced polygon technology of the time. "A radical new technology," as it was called on Comanche's box. But where did these 3D

» [PC] The main game starts you off with 20 missions. The two add-ons brought 70 more, and the CD version added another ten of them, bringing it to a round 100.

» [PC] There are no polygon objects in the game: all parts of the landscape (including this pyramid) are made of voxels, while everything else is sprite-based.

"BECAUSE COMANCHE REQUIRED A 386 FOR ITS CODE, IF YOU RAN IT ON A 286 IT SPIT OUT A GRC ERROR – GRC STOOD FOR 'GET A REAL COMPUTER'"
KYLE FREEMAN

graphics come from, which made detailed, natural-looking landscapes possible? "Earlier in my career I worked on medical imaging," Kyle tells us. Voxels have been used there for several years, delivering three-dimensional pictures of the human body – in magnetic resonance imaging, for example. But how do you turn this technology, which can take 10-15 minutes to capture a single image, into a system that runs in real-time and at a minimum of 20 frames per second on a standard PC? "I ventured into 32-bit assembler, before there were 32-bit compilers or even operating systems. *Comanche* was, to the best of my knowledge, the very first 32-bit game, no 16-bit code at all." Kyle tells us. "This opened up direct access to 4MBs of RAM, allowing all the audio and textures the game had. Because *Comanche* was one of the first games to require a 386 for its code, if you ran it on a 286 it spit out a GRC error – GRC stood for 'Get a Real Computer.'"

» [PC] The graphics may look low-res and blocky today, but the organic landscapes are still a sight to behold in motion.

COMANCHE'S COMPETITION

OTHER EARLY NINETIES GAMES FEATURING THE COMANCHE

GUNSHIP 2000

■ The sequel to the immensely successful *Gunship* (1986), Microprose's *Gunship 2000* (1991) was a true simulation at its core. You start the game with a choice of five different helicopters, but as your rank increases, two additional models become available: another Apache variant – and the RAH-66 Comanche.

LHX ATTACK CHOPPER

■ Electronic Arts' *LHX Attack Chopper* (1990) was the very first game to feature the Comanche, although it goes by a different name there: at the time, the helicopter was still known by its development name Light Helicopter Experimental – which in turn gave this game its title. The name Comanche was finally adopted in 1991.

JUNGLE STRIKE

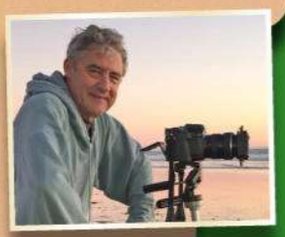
■ *Jungle Strike* (1993), the sequel to the smash hit *Desert Strike* (which featured an Apache helicopter), puts the Comanche directly on its cover, and also front and centre of its game design – although you later also control a motorbike, a hovercraft and an F-117 stealth bomber.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ARMORED FIST
RELEASED: 1994
PLATFORM: PC

DELTA FORCE (PICTURED)
RELEASED: 1999
PLATFORM: PC

THE FRINGE
RELEASED: 2000
PLATFORM: PC



JOHN GARCIA

» John was born in Spain, moved to the US in the early Sixties and originally studied psychology, before working for companies like Datasoft and founding NovaLogic in 1985. Today he is the CEO of Disruptive Technologies, and a passionate photographer.

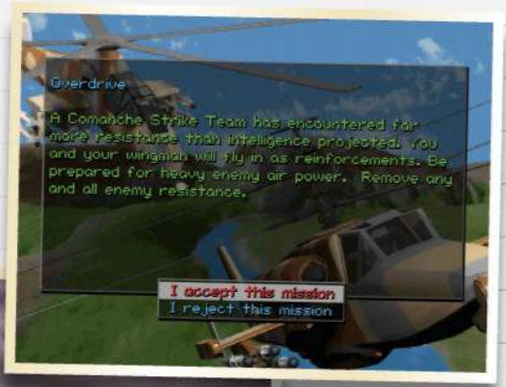
Developing *Comanche* took about seven to nine months, according to John and Kyle. The dev team was very small – for the most part it only consisted of Kyle. "The original *Comanche* was just me, doing all the programming, tools, art and sound design," he explains. "At the last minute, I did get some help on the mission loading screens." After many long nights, the result was a graphics system called Voxel Space, which was eventually even patented.

At first, Kyle tried to build the levels in a classic 3D editor. However, he very quickly realised that this did not work well with the voxel graphics system. So he developed his own editor. "I created a set of tools to help generate and polish terrains because of the technical need for them to seamlessly wrap. Some terrains were generated with fractals, some were hand drawn, and the tools could realistically colour them, simulate rain and time erosion, and eliminate seams to make them look realistic. All the maps were computer generated, but the erosion tools were built to mimic real terrain."

The size of the maps then had to be greatly reduced in order to keep the calculating and memory requirements within reasonable limits. As a result, the levels are quite small and wrap around endlessly. "The original *Comanche* had to fit in 4MB to run on a reasonable number of computers as few people had more RAM at the time," Kyle tells us. "The original terrains wrapped after 1km with fairly high detail. That was the biggest I could fit in 4MB."

The decision to use the Boeing-Sikorsky RAH-66 Comanche helicopter as the centre of the game was quickly decided upon, as Kyle explains. "At the time, the Comanche was being covered by popular magazines as a fly-by-wire marvel. Fly-by-wire promised a near zero learning curve. Perfect for a game that wanted to be fast paced and arcade-like." John adds, "The sexiest helicopter under development was in fact the Comanche. It was bleeding edge, it was stealthy, it was different and cool-looking! After the initial release we built up a very good relationship with the Boeing Sikorsky folks, they gave us the latest CAD drawings hot off the printer. Our project was good for everybody, they loved it as much as we did. They appreciated the free PR and exposure to the masses."

But that doesn't mean that *Comanche* is a hardcore simulation – on the contrary, it's an arcade shoot-fest with a few simulator elements. Also there is no story to speak of. "Much like TV shows of the time, the Comanche missions were supposed to be episodic, so that you could pick up and play anytime. Plus a story arc would have taken more time. I think I wrote most of the mission briefings in a single day," Kyle says about *Comanche*'s narrative drought. *Comanche* also remains as simple as possible on a gameplay


Overdrive
A Comanche Strike Team has encountered far more resistance than intelligence projected. You and your wingman will fly in as reinforcements. Be prepared for heavy enemy air power. Remove any and all enemy resistance.
I accept this mission
I reject this mission

» [PC] Due to memory limitations, the maps are small and wrap around endlessly – if you fly in a straight line, you pass the same landmarks over and over again.

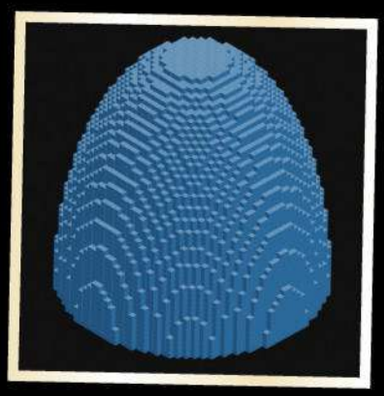
» [PC] The enemy AI is pretty much non-existent – they just shoot straight at you from all distances, and helicopters even try to ram you in mid-air.

WHAT IS A VOXEL?

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF 3D GRAPHICS

A voxel is a volumetric pixel, ie a three-dimensional pixel. A pixel is a two-dimensional entity that contains a colour and a brightness value. A voxel, on the other hand, has an additional Z-axis – and this three-dimensionality offers significantly more space for further information. For example, the density and composition of the material it represents, the light source angle or its reflection potential. Voxels as a visualisation technique have been in use in various scientific fields since the late-Eighties – such as meteorology, where it is used to realistically calculate cloud formations. Or in medicine, where it is used in areas such as computer tomography to visualise the inner workings of the human body in three dimensions.

Comanche was the very first product to bring voxels from serious applications into games, and after that they were all the rage for some time, and not just with NovaLogic. Games like *Robinson's Requiem* (1994), *Blade Runner* (1997) and *Outcast* (1999) were defined by their voxel aesthetic – and even today, games like *Minecraft* (2009), *No Man's Sky* (2016) and *The Touryst* (2019) use voxel graphics in one way or another.



"THE SEXIEST HELICOPTER UNDER DEVELOPMENT WAS IN FACT THE COMANCHE"
JOHN GARCIA

» [PC] All enemies are sprites, pre-rendered from multiple perspectives. Due to their low resolution they look rather blocky from up close.

KYLE FREEMAN

» Born and raised in California, Kyle started creating computer games in high school which led him to become vice president of technology for NovaLogic. In 2012 he started working for Disney as an Imagineer, and is now working as a freelance developer again.

level: all missions, ten in the Comanche Training and ten more in Operation: Maximum Overkill, are structured in the same way and differ primarily in the looks of the landscape and the number of enemies.

However, the most relevant departure from realism was the namesake itself. The *Comanche* helicopter didn't even exist in real life back then – in 1992 it was still in its development stage, the first airworthy prototype took off in January 1996. The enemies are also one of the weaker aspects of *Comanche*, especially as there are only three different types in the entire game: an anti-air gun, a T-80 tank and a KA-50 helicopter, which only become dangerous due to their sheer numbers.

But none of this stopped the game from being a huge success – according to John, it sold around one million copies. So it's no wonder that updates followed quickly: a few months after the main game, the first add-on called *Global Challenge* was released, which brought with it more enemy types, improved AI and 30 more missions in two fresh scenarios. Another six months later, the second add-on *Over The Edge* entered the stores, featuring 40 extra missions, even more enemies and fancy new effects such as water reflections.

Werewolf Vs Comanche 2.0, which debuted at the end of 1995, was basically more of the same, with slightly enhanced graphics, a new helicopter (the Kamov Ka-50) and a network mode for up to eight pilots. The game wasn't a smash hit, but according to John it was still important for NovaLogic. "*Comanche 2* included new and more complex missions, which was the biggest request from our fanbase. There were also many incremental improvements, the enemies were smarter, it had an improved flight model, and it supported a head-to-head mode via modem. This opened the door for more sophisticated connection models and by 1997 all NovaLogic products had internet connectivity."

Two more games followed over the years: the 1997 release *Comanche 3* used the brand-new Voxel Space 2 graphics system, which clearly outshone its predecessor in every way. "*Comanche 3* is closer to what I had in my head when I was making the original *Comanche*, but I was stopped by the slower CPUs of the day," Kyle says. *Comanche 4* (2001) was the final game in the series – although according to John a fifth instalment was planned, but then stopped before development took off, around the same time as the real-world Comanche was discontinued. Just like the spin-off for the Super Nintendo, which was to utilise the second generation of the Super FX chip for reasonably fast voxel graphics on the ageing console. Still, it was never finished. "Even with the Super FX chip, the SNES was too blocky and the memory was too limited for a full-sized map. I think the combination of blocky look, less gameplay, and higher cost due to the Super FX chip ultimately killed it," Kyle remembers. He even experimented with a Sega Mega Drive port, but that version never led to any tangible results.

The *Comanche 3* name resurfaced in 2021 through THQ Nordic, but none of the original creators were directly involved in that game. Voxels have lost the fight against polygons. And the original game is nowhere to be found on the usual suspects of digital game stores. Which is a shame because it is still a joy to play. Of course it looks outdated today with its chunky enemy sprites and low resolution, and it always was a bit of a lightweight in terms of content. But at the same time, it has also always been so much fun – a flight simulator for people who hate flight simulators! Maximum Overkill, just like it says on the box.

» [PC] Some of *Comanche*'s missions take place at night, which you get to see through an eerie emerald green night vision light.

» [PC] The landscapes with their realistic, gently rolling hills were simply spectacular in 1992, and made *Comanche* look so much better than any contemporary flight game.

1UP
27910
HIGH SCORE
27910
CREDIT
0
JUMP
JUMP

Namco Classic Collection Vol 2

PAC IN ACTION

» ARCADE » 1996 » NAMCO

Imagine the scenario – you caught a glimpse of an interesting game you didn't recognise in some arcade far from home, but didn't get the chance to take a proper look at it, never mind play it. If you're reading this magazine, you can probably relate to such an experience, and you probably spent a good time obsessing over that game. I know that was the case when I saw a version of *Pac-Man* I'd never seen before on a seaside trip about 20 years ago, and since the internet wasn't as comprehensive then as it is today, I spent years wondering what it could be.

Some time later, I finally discovered that it was the arranged version of *Pac-Man* featured in *Namco Classic Collection Vol 2*, which also features *Dig Dug* and *Rally-X* in original and arranged forms. Initially, the game just seems like *Pac-Man* with a mid-Nineties graphical makeover, but there's actually quite a bit more going on. For a start, the ghosts now have powered-up forms that allow them to charge at Pac-Man, try to jump on him, split in two and more. But Pac-Man can collect power-ups of his own, and that's not all. Some ghosts are blue as standard, and eating them gives the same effect as a power pellet, which is enormously handy if you've already chomped through your supply. Additionally, Dash Points allow him to charge in one direction at high speed, stunning any ghosts that happen to get in his way, and Jump Points allow him to traverse the maze quickly by taking shortcuts from corner to corner. The ghosts can use these too, so you'll need to watch out.

Overall, this arranged version of *Pac-Man* is not quite as radical an overhaul of the classic formula as *Pac-Mania*, nor is it the equal of the later *Pac-Man Championship Edition*. However, it's definitely an interesting variant for anyone who played the original game to exhaustion.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

GAMATE GAMES

A lesser-loved Nineties handheld, Bit Corporation's Gamate has plenty of collector appeal today. What's more, some of its games aren't completely terrible. But you're going to encounter a lot of clones in this system's catalogue

Words by Mike Diver

» [Gamate] Hannibal faces off against a giant *Totoro*-style soot sprite.

» [Gamate] This mermaid boss looks like she would really rather be anywhere else.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF HANNIBAL THE CAT

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP** ■ YEAR: **1993**

Presentation is rarely a key consideration with Gamate games. From frequent localisation errors to poorly animated sprites and music that makes you want to empty a glue gun into your earholes, these are often basic experiences that, at best, provide a playable-enough version of a better-known title. But *The Further Adventures Of Hannibal The Cat*, a relatively late release in the console's limited lifespan (it was discontinued by 1994), looks and feels relatively premium. It even opens with an expression of pride from its makers, as developer names are shown on the title screen.

But start the game and it's clear that director Sheling Chiou and team have a couple of major inspirations for this fantastical side-scrolling shoot-'em-up. Firstly, let's address Hannibal The Cat. Clearly this is Totoro, from the classic 1988 Studio Ghibli movie *My Neighbor Totoro*. Our portly feline protagonist flies through the air with the greatest of ease, occasionally revealing a little umbrella, collecting acorns dropped by defeated enemies (which include evil vegetables, buzzy insects and the soot sprites from the same film).

The *Totoro* thievery continues through to the ending screen, which sees Hannibal fly away on a magical spinning top before the credits roll. To reach that, the player must guide them through seven surreal stages. The first has ice-capped and weirdly smiling volcanoes in the background; the fourth is underwater and ends with a shoot-out against a topless (and uncensored) mermaid; and the sixth fuses toyshop freakery (maniacal jack-in-the-boxes, miniature cannons set to kill) with an industrial kitchen full of knives. You're absolutely not in Kansas anymore – or, more accurately, rural Japan in the Fifties.

As cute as some of these visuals are (the other obvious influence being Konami's *Parodius* series – one boss is a Captain Penguinovski III lookalike, albeit with an Apollo Creed-style top hat instead of pirate gear), the game is exceptionally hard. Projectiles fill the tiny screen,

IF YOU LIKE THIS TAY...

FANTASY ZONE
ARCADE, 1986

■ Another side-scrolling shooter with surreal visuals, *Fantasy Zone* remains a feast for the eyeballs so many years on from its 1986 debut. True, *Opa-Opa* is no *Totoro* in popular culture terms, but at least this game's star is a Sega original.

PARODIUS
ARCADE, 1990

■ Konami's cutesy but challenging shooter series is one of the core influences on *Hannibal The Cat*, and *Parodius* (or *Parodius Da!* as it's known in Japan) is where this Gamate effort pinches one stage's boss enemy from.

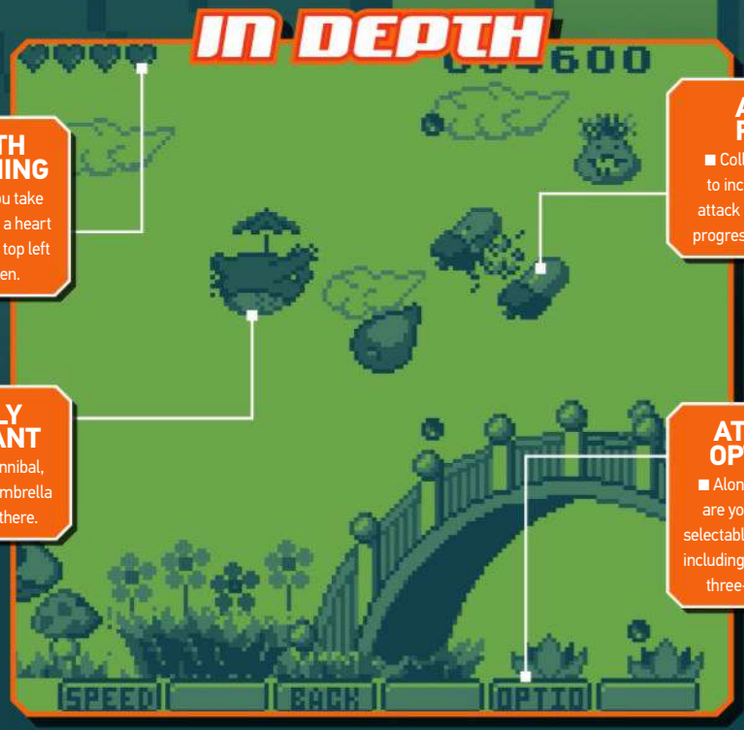
POP'N TWINBEE
GAME BOY, 1990

■ The Game Boy version of *Pop'n TwinBee* does a terrific job of translating the SNES original's colourful action to monochrome portable play. Another so-called cute-'em-up, this is amongst the best vertical shooters on Nintendo's famous handheld.

and played on the Gamate itself the flickering, while minimal compared to most of the handheld's other shooters, means you're often blasting enemies through sheer luck rather than intent. If you want to take this trip for yourself, it's recommended that you emulate it and add some infinite health to the settings, if you want to see just how weird it can get.

Despite its ripped-off elements, *Hannibal The Cat* is rather endearing. It's a game made with love – and not many Gamate titles exude that feeling. Once the "stafe" (their spelling) credits finish, there's a wonderful little message, "I hope you like it!! I love you, love all friend!!" You just can't be mad at it... can you?

IN DEPTH



HEALTH REMAINING
■ Every hit you take loses Hannibal a heart – so watch the top left of the screen.

ACORN POWER
■ Collect these acorns to increase Hannibal's attack powers and make progression a little easier.

BROLLY BRILLIANT
■ Come on Hannibal, that's Totoro's umbrella you've nicked there.

ATTACK OPTIONS
■ Along the bottom are your available, selectable firing modes, including rear shots and three-way spray.

Minority Report

KILL SHOT

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP** ■ YEAR: **1991**

Don't be fooled into assuming this is a hyper-violent experience with a title like *Kill Shot,* as it really isn't. Equally, don't start thinking this might be the rare Gamate experience that isn't a rip-off. *Kill Shot* is Konami's puzzle-shooter *Quarth* from 1981, basically, funnelling the player's cute spacecraft along narrow tunnels and charging them with clearing an array of *Tetris*-ish blocks by expanding them into quadrilateral proportions. Your shots don't kill but fill, then, although there's the occasional enemy to destroy, too.

Quarth came to the Game Boy in 1990, but Bit Corp's clone isn't based on that version, instead lifting its streamlined gameplay from the arcade original. There's no ship selection then, and the level design stays very basic – just a tube scrolling onward, with different block designs either side to identify which of the game's four stages you're in (each of which are divided into three levels).

That said, it also plays very well, with slower movement ensuring minimal flicker (blinking enemies like cartwheeling clowns and spherical meteors aside) and making passage through the levels achievable. Which is to say unlike many Gamate shooters, the odds don't feel stacked against you because of the hardware you're playing on. So far as 'ports' of *Quarth* go, *Kill Shot*'s a fine one.

» [Gamate] The hero of the game, and their cute ship ready for launch.

» [Gamate] You clear the blocks before they cross your ship's line, just like *Quarth*.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY

» TENNIS

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Bit Corp's *Tennis* looks almost identical to Nintendo's Game Boy title, even featuring a Mario-like umpire (the shades fool nobody), but it doesn't play the same. Lob is replaced with a smash, and there's no way to slice the ball. It lacks nuance, then, but if you can stomach the flicker this is a fun racket for a little while.

» PUNK BOY

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP/UMC**
■ YEAR: **1992**

■ This tricky platformer tells the story of Charlie, who must save his girlfriend from a witch. To do so, Charlie butt-bounces his way across six levels in a style similar to Mickey Mouse's own colourful adventure in *Castle Of Illusion*. While not quite a clone, *Punk Boy* takes several cues from the Sega classic, but is harder to beat.

» VINDICATORS

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ Available on a standalone Gamate Card and as part of a four-in-one release alongside *Cube-Up* (a *Tetris* clone), *Brickblaster* (indebted to *Breakout*) and *Mini Golf* (bad, just bad), *Vindicators* is basically Namco's *Battle City* with its palette swap and with your tank sounding more like a galloping horse than a war machine.

» MONSTER PITFALL

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ *Pitfall!* sent Harry into the jungle in search of treasure, but this Bit Corp clone switches character and location, dropping protagonist Indianapolis Jones (sigh) into Egypt on a quest for the Eye Of The Nile. Background motivation aside, this is exactly what you're expecting: a logs-dodging, snake-shooting treasure hunt against the clock.

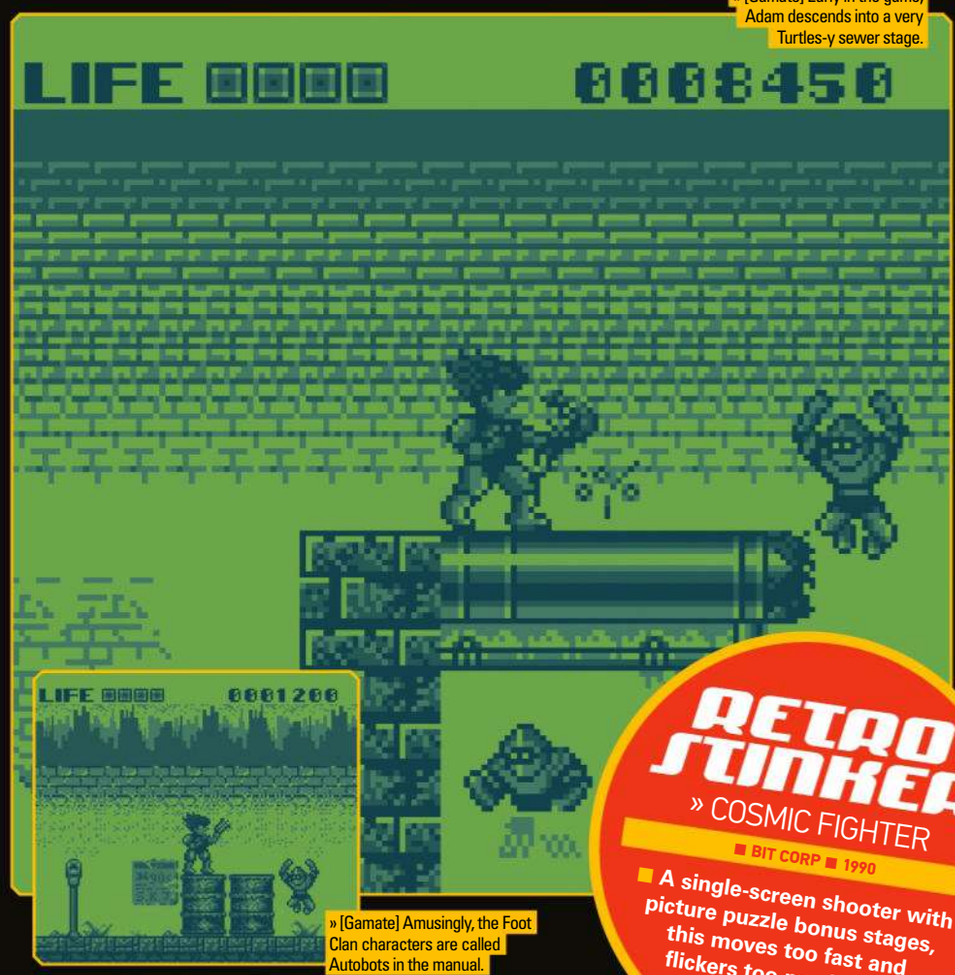
TOUGH GUY

■ DEVELOPER: **UMC** ■ YEAR: **1993**

■ **By now you'll have realised a lot of the better Gamate games are actually clones of more popular titles.** *Kill Shot* is *Quarth*. *Vindicators* is *Battle City*. The list goes beyond those featured on these pages, too – *Kiki Island* (sometimes spelled '*Inland*') is *Adventure Island*, and the excellently named *Fortress Of Fierceness* is a very playable copy of Jaleco's great Game Boy title *Fortified Zone*.

Tough Guy – called *Metamorphosiser* on its box art – is another Game Boy release cloned and (barely) reskinned for Gamate play. If the background art isn't an immediate giveaway, the appearance of a Foot Clan warrior seals it: this is Nineties *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Fall Of The Foot Clan* in disguise, with the multi-turtle play of the Game Boy adventure shifted to standard lives for our hero, Prince Adam (no *He-Man*-style powering up here, sadly).

The game begins with three selectable weapons for Adam – and these are his lives. Lose all your health, and the weapon you were using becomes unusable. You can pick from sword (Leo's katana), double club (Mikey's nunchucks), or spear (confusingly, Raph's sais). Bosses are familiar too, but that's not Rocksteady at the end of stage one, it's, ahem, Rhino Man. So yes, *Tough Guy*'s just *Turtles* – but that *Turtles* game is great, and this isn't half-bad either.



» [Gamate] Early in the game, Adam descends into a very Turtles-y sewer stage.

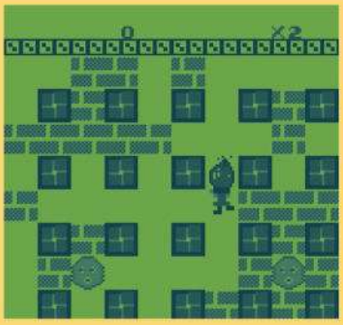
» [Gamate] Amusingly, the Foot Clan characters are called Autobots in the manual.

RETRO STINKER

» COSMIC FIGHTER

■ BIT CORP ■ 1990

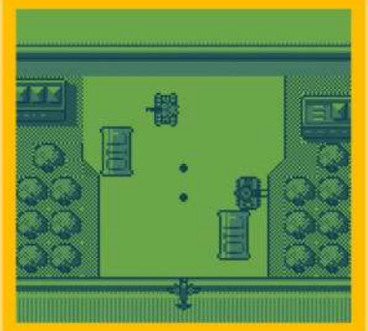
■ **A single-screen shooter with picture puzzle bonus stages, this moves too fast and flickers too much to be close to playable.**



» BOMB BLAST

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ *Bomb Blast* says the box, but *Bomb Blaster* says the manual. Ultimately it makes no difference what you call this early Gamate offering, as it's a clone of Hudson Soft's *Bomberman*. And that's fine, as it's a serviceable version of its inspiration, albeit one where a "1 or 2 players" promise only extends to taking turns on the same console.



» MARAUDER

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Another Gamate title that looks to Atari's past for its thievery, *Marauder* is this handheld's take on *River Raid*. The player must fly their B-26 along a river, taking out enemies, while dodging incoming fire and replenishing their fuel supply. With its flickering minimal, this is a very playable shooter on a platform without many alternatives.

» BOOM!

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ *BOOM!* is a clone of *Pang*, the balloon-popping game that was something of an arcade success in 1989, which itself drew its share of cues from 1983's *Cannon Ball* by Hudson Soft. If you're ripping off a rip-off, does that make it better? *BOOM!* plays just fine: clear the balls/balloons, avoid the enemies, and it's onto the next level.

» DINOSAUR PARK

■ DEVELOPER: **BIT CORP**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ If you're expecting prehistoric lizards trampling public greenery here, you're in for a shock, as *Dinosaur Park* is a one-on-one fighter starring Ghibli-inspired (ahem, stolen) characters. Beat an opponent and you can select them for the next bout – a twist on the typical fighter formula. The final boss is basically the *Totoro* cat bus.

RAPH KOSTER

Discover how Raph's unconventional upbringing and university experience with online MUDs influenced his work on the pioneering MMORPGs Ultima Online and Star Wars Galaxies – both of which involved some truly terrifying crunch

Words by Lewis Packwood

Raph Koster originally intended to become a writer, but was seduced by the allure of videogames while at university. After he co-created the online RPG *LegendMUD*, he was snapped up by Origin Systems and became lead designer on the groundbreaking MMORPG *Ultima Online*. He later worked on an online version of *Wing Commander: Privateer*, but the project was cancelled, and he moved to Sony Online to become creative director on *Star Wars Galaxies*. After leaving Sony, Raph established Metaplace, an early attempt at creating the metaverse, then spent several years as a consultant before founding Playable Worlds in 2018, which is currently working on an as-yet-unnamed MMO.

» Raph Koster's fascination with game design began early and saw him making board game adaptations of his favourite games.

Photo credits: Dylan Cuthbert (right), 2.0 Official GDC (far right)

How did you get into games?
My mom brought home a Sears Pong console, from when *Pong* was first available in stores. We got an Atari not too long after that. I remember my dad was pretty good at *Space Invaders* in the arcade, and I got a home computer given to me by my great uncle in maybe 82, 83.

My mother worked for UNICEF, so I was actually living overseas – I was down in Peru at that point. My parents were divorced: I'd spend summers with my dad in the States, and that meant I was learning to program and playing *D&D* and all of that kind of thing down in Peru, and then coming back to the States where I would be seeing the latest arcade games.

Before I knew how to program, I started making board game versions of the videogames that I would see in the States. And so I ported *Q*bert* and *Pengo* and lots of others to tabletop, and actually made them out of paper and cardboard. That started around fourth or fifth grade.

So you started game design really early on?
Yes. I actually still have most of those tabletop games I made. In hindsight, it was amazing training for game design. This all culminated when myself and a couple of friends formed a little 'company' that we called Protocom, short for Prototype Computing, and we started trying to make games and sell them to classmates who had computers, of which there weren't that many in Peru. And we did succeed at selling one copy of one game in a Ziplock baggie. So that was my very first game sale – I was probably 13 or 14.

You had quite an unconventional upbringing: didn't your father live in a commune at the time?
He did live in a commune for a bunch of my childhood. So, of course, that was all very granola and organic, and not computery at all. But my dad was – and is still – very forward thinking. He has worked as a futurist pretty much his entire career. He was organising solar energy fairs as early as 1974.

How do you think your upbringing influenced your career?
Oh, a lot. Living in a lot of countries really gave me a very different feeling about almost everything. I'd spent more time outside the US than in it by the time I finished high school, and I'd visited a bunch of countries and lived in three others by then. You get a very different perspective on humanity, on society, on everything. Not being immersed in aspects of American culture gave me very different impressions of race, patriotism, capitalism, you name it.

You didn't pursue games initially, did you?
No, when I was a kid, everybody told me, "You're going to be a writer or a teacher." I learned to read extremely young: my grandmother was a school teacher, and she taught me how to read when I was two. I was reading Robert Ludlum when I was in preschool. I just read voraciously.

I was always telling stories, and it was just sort of assumed I was going to turn into a writer. I edited the high-school literary magazine, and I ended up double majoring in English and Spanish at college, then went straight to graduate school for creative writing and got a master of fine arts. During that same time, I had gotten back into games in the form of MUDs [multi-user dungeons], which were text-based predecessors to MMOs. So I ended up not using that MFA for anything, and instead got into the games industry.

> We were doing something completely alien and deeply weird, relative to everybody else
>
> Raph Koster

ULTIMATE AMBITION

How Ultima Online changed the world

■ "We wanted to make an alternate reality," says Raph about his ambitions for *Ultima Online*. "We were all sci-fi readers, we had all read Snow Crash, and we knew that we were building the next generation of what a MUD could be. We leaned really heavily into all kinds of things that were really unusual. We insisted that in our game, you had to be able to sit down. We put in a pet system, we let you own a house, we let you dye your clothing and customise your avatar to a degree that had not been seen before in games. We let you form guilds. We put in crafting. *Ultima* had allowed you to bake bread as a one-off here and there: *Ultima Online* was built on a substrate of a whole player-driven economy."

On its release in 1997, *Ultima Online* got a mixed critical reception, partly as a result of offering perhaps too much freedom. "It had a horrendous problem with player killing, because we were pretty permissive about that," says Raph. The introduction of safe zones eventually calmed down the murder sprees, but the creativity of players meant the game offered much more than casual killing, like player-run sporting events and touring theatre groups. "This resulted in think pieces in *Wired* magazine and *The New Yorker* almost immediately," says Raph, "because it was like the birth of a new online society." Virtual goods from *Ultima Online* even ended up being sold on a new site called eBay. "The first time we saw a castle sell for $9,000 in 1997, we were just astonished," says Raph.

There were plenty of other headline-grabbing events, too. The time that Origin's Richard Garriott was murdered by another player while playing as Lord British made international news. In short, *Ultima Online* was a very big deal. "Online games had been around in the form of MUDs since the Seventies, but this was a moment when the rest of the world had to sit up and realise, 'Wait a minute, science fiction is coming true over here,'" says Raph. "It was an inflection point, it felt like we were leaving a dent on the universe."

» [PC] *Ultima Online*'s legacy continues to this day. The latest version by Broadsword Online Games has both Classic and Enhanced clients.

» Raph's Atari 130XE. Released in 1985, it was his third 8-bit computer.

Which MUD were you working on at the time?

The first one that we all got hooked on was called *Worlds Of Carnage*, and then the game shut down. So my friends Sherry Menton and Rick Delashmit started working on one called *LegendMUD*, and later my wife Kristen and I joined them. Together, we built up the basics of *LegendMUD* over the course of 1993, and opened officially to the internet on Valentine's Day 1994.

It was a historical based world: Sherry was a history major. So if you went to Victorian London, there'd be Victorian ladies and pastry shops and whatever, but there would also be a vampire in the belfry and mysterious cases for Sherlock Holmes. The fact that we were doing it in text really let us do things that would be extraordinarily challenging to do with modern graphics. Eventually, Sherry and Rick stepped back from being the two folks in charge, and Kristen and I took over and ran it for many years, until I had to stop to focus more on work.

How did you get involved with *Ultima Online*?

They wanted to find people who had expertise in building online games – and the place to look for them was the text MUDs. The folks at Origin – Richard Garriott and Starr Long – happened to find Rick Delashmit, and Rick recommended my wife and I as designers.

» Raph made the game *Orion* when he was a teenager. He and his school friends set up the 'company' Protocom to sell their games.

What was it like working at Origin?

Origin was a storied place. At that point, the *Ultima* series had been the most prominent series in role-playing games for over a decade and a half. It was the *Final Fantasy* of its day. Origin had been acquired by EA, and they were in the midst of making *Wing Commander IV*, which was the largest CD-ROM game ever made at that point. There were five separate development groups within Origin at that point, each of them headed by people like Chris Roberts, Richard Garriott and Warren Spector.

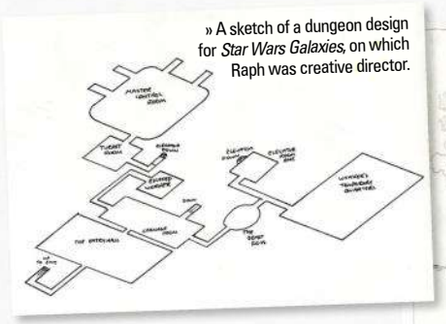
But we were doing something completely alien and deeply weird, relative to everybody else. We were a bunch of punk kids – almost all of us were under the age of 25, and several of us had been recruited out of text MUDs. We ran as a real skunkworks project. We were on a different floor of the building, tucked away in a corner. Starr sat with us, but we rarely saw Richard at first.

EA had a lifetime forecast for *Ultima Online* of about 30,000 players, so they were only willing to give a budget of $250,000. We showed at E3 in 1996 six months after I got there, and we had 50,000 people send us $5 each to get a CD-ROM to do an alpha test, which meant we had paid back our budget and exceeded the forecast already. That very quickly resulted in us going from this tiny skunkworks project to ballooning and having a ton of pressure.

Did you ever feel like you'd bitten off more than you could chew?

Yeah, we were nuts. In hindsight, the ambition of it was bananas. Pretty much the entirety of the *Ultima IX* team joined us, and they hired a bunch more people. There

> "The one I really wanted to do was MULE Online, but through this hilarious sequence of political events, EA didn't have all the rights to MULE"
> Raph Koster



» A sketch of a dungeon design for *Star Wars Galaxies*, on which Raph was creative director.

» A hand-drawn map of the world of *Ultima Online*.

were enormous tensions with the *Ultima IX* people, just enormous, because they came from making linear single-player games. It was often very uncomfortable.

We showed at E3 again in the spring of 1997, and at that point most of the game was there. We shipped in September, so it was just about two years from the day I joined.

To think that you could ship something so ambitious in two years is phenomenal, really.
Yeah, it was done incredibly quickly, which did mean 80-hour weeks, working through weekends. My first kid was born during the crunch of *Ultima Online*, and we just had them in the office. Kristen nursed in the office, and we'd tuck the baby carrier under the desk. I would sleep on a futon under my desk. It was everything you hear about horrendous crunch stories.

And *Ultima Online* launched extraordinarily buggy: it needed more time, absolutely. But an executive actually came around and visited each of us, and said, "There's going to be a vote on whether to launch this tomorrow. It would be a career-limiting move to vote against launching the game."

Did you receive many complaints after *Ultima Online* launched?
We were deluged with complaints – but it became the fastest- selling game in EA history. It was seismic, but it was exhausting. We were tremendously overworked, and one month after the game had come out, I was the only team member left standing on the project.

What happened to everyone else?
Everyone else either moved over to what became an abortive attempt to create an *Ultima Online 2*, or quit the company altogether.

It's interesting that people plunged into a sequel, because nowadays we think of MMOs as essentially endless.
EA did not understand that. Many of us were saying this is a very bad idea. EA was saying, "No, we need to make a sequel," and a big part of that was probably to jump on the 3D graphics wave: *Ultima Online* was the last gasp of incredibly high-end 2D engines. Frankly, you couldn't have made *Ultima Online* in 3D at the time, the performance wasn't quite there yet to have all of the freedoms.

What did you do next?
I started getting asked, "Hey, could you take the *UO* platform and build a new game on top of that code?" I developed a few pitches: the one I really wanted to do was *MULE Online*, but through this hilarious sequence of political events, EA didn't have all the rights to *MULE*.

So it became something called *Star Settlers*, then EA said it should be in the *Wing Commander* universe. And I'm like, "*Wing Commander* doesn't have planetary settlements," and they're like, "But *Privateer* does," and so it became *Privateer Online*. Then they said, "Wait, *UO* is a 2D engine, and *Privateer* is a 3D spaceflight game," so then the *UO* engine reuse turned into a brand-new engine.

RAPH'S PICKS

Key projects Raph was involved with

LEGENDMUD

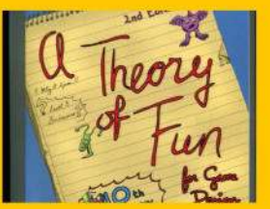
■ Raph co-developed this text-based multi-user dungeon alongside his wife Kristen and Sherry and Rick Delashmit. The premise is 'the world the way they thought it was', and the game sees you travelling between time periods where fact is mingled with fiction. *LegendMUD* launched in 1994, and you can still play it at legendmud.org

ULTIMA ONLINE

■ Launched in 1997, *Ultima Online* kick-started the craze for MMORPGs. Raph was recruited by Origin Systems and became the lead designer due to his experience with MUDs, and the team created a world of ambition. *Ultima Online* became EA's fastest ever selling computer game on its release.

STAR WARS GALAXIES

■ Raph was brought in as creative director part way through development of the MMORPG *Star Wars Galaxies*, and oversaw a complete redesign of the game. It launched in a less than finished state, but the team doggedly set about fixing it over the next few months.



A THEORY OF FUN FOR GAME DESIGN

■ Not a game this time, but rather a book about how to make games. Raph's *A Theory Of Fun* is regarded as a seminal text in game development circles, and is still one of the core texts studied by students getting started in game design some two decades after its release.

MY VINEYARD

■ After leaving Sony Online, Raph established Metaplace, which worked a bit like *Roblox*, allowing users to create their own games and worlds. The firm later pivoted to Facebook games, of which *My Vineyard* was one of the most popular. The game saw players planting, harvesting and crushing grapes to make wine to sell.

SELECTED TIMELINE

- **LEGENDMUD** [1994] PC
- **ULTIMA ONLINE** [1997] PC
- **ULTIMA ONLINE: THE SECOND AGE** [1998] PC
- **PRIVATEER ONLINE** (CANCELLED) PC
- **STAR WARS GALAXIES** [2003] PC
- **STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED** [2004] PC
- **A THEORY OF FUN FOR GAME DESIGN** [2004] BOOK
- **UNTOLD LEGENDS** [2005] PSP
- **METAPLACE** [2007] PC
- **ISLAND LIFE** [2010] WEB
- **MY VINEYARD** [2010] WEB
- **DEEP REALMS** [2011] WEB
- **JACKPOT TRIVIA** [2015] ARCADE
- **POSTMORTEMS** [2018] BOOK
- **TRUCK STARS AR** [2018] MOBILE
- **NIGHTENFELL** [2018] MOBILE
- **WADDLE** [2021] BOARD GAME

What happened next?
We went from a quick-turnaround project to a new, monster 3D game that was in a different IP that wasn't even part of our studio. Chris Roberts' group were furious that we were getting to do this, because they had been wanting to do a *Wing Commander Online*. So then some of them got put onto the team, and that caused fresh culture conflict. We actually got a prototype going, and we showed the whole thing to the company – and were promptly cancelled by EA in favour of *Earth & Beyond*. So *Privateer Online* was a year of work, and it just went poof.

The core of the *Privateer Online* team quit and were offered a deal by Sony Online, who were the makers of *EverQuest*. And then Sony Online said, "Actually, we want to hand you *Star Wars*," which we did not expect.

> "Crunch is enormously destructive. An awful lot of colleagues from that time period who were my age are dead"
> Raph Koster

How did you feel then?
Terrified. It was public knowledge that the project existed, and it had supposedly been going for a year, maybe longer. They asked us, "Hey, can you come in and do an evaluation of where the project sits?" And we had done that and said, "It's not where you think it is, it is behind." And we present the report, and they're like, "OK, take it over." And we're like, "Take it over? There's a whole team, it's gonna be a mess, they're gonna hate us." So we debated all the flight back. It was all like, "It's *Star Wars*." "Yeah, but it's gonna be mad crunch." "But it's *Star Wars*." "Yeah, but it's going to be politically a nightmare." "But it's *Star Wars*."

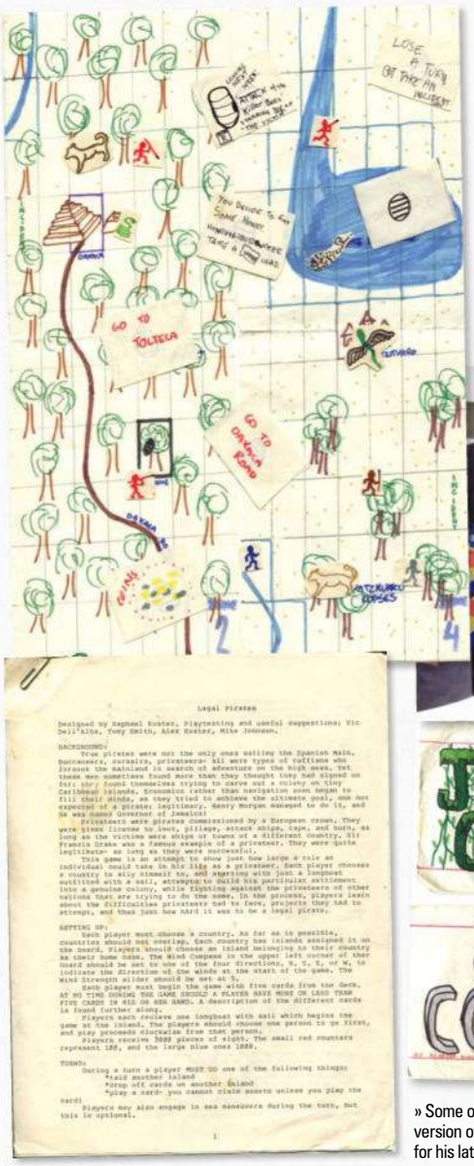
It was a mess. The entire programming team in San Diego quit. I felt really bad for the guy who had been running the project. And then we were on a crazy tight timeline. We had to basically redesign everything, because the other mandate we were given was, "The design is too much like *EverQuest*, make it more like *Ultima Online*."

It was a death march, it was diving right back into horrendous crunch. We built *Galaxies* in two years and nine months.

Were you crunching that whole time?
Not the whole time, but probably for at least a year and a half of it.

Wow, that's awful.
Yes. Between *Ultima Online* and *Galaxies*, I probably put on 100 pounds from eating junk food all the time. I've never managed to lose it all back. Crunch is enormously destructive. An awful lot of colleagues from that time period who were my age are dead. Heart attacks, cancers, suicides. Lots of cases of drug addiction.

So you launched *Star Wars Galaxies* after this momentous crunch period – what was the reception like?
We shipped it, in my opinion, a year early. It was far from ready. I had asked for an



» Some of the tabletop games that Raph made as a kid, including a tabletop version of the arcade game *Q*bert*. He says these games were amazing training for his later work in videogame design.

» Raph still remains interested in board game design, and has created many board game prototypes over the years.

» After Metaplace was bought by Disney-owned Playdom in 2010, Raph worked as creative director on the web game *Deep Realms*.

additional year: they were willing to let me slip from May 4 to the end of June, that was all the time they were willing to give.

We had built a community of about a quarter of a million people in forums, and we found all of the top community members and flew them to the office. We basically fell on our swords and said, "Hey, the game's not ready, but it's going to ship anyway, and we could use your help, because we're gonna keep working on it to deliver what we promised. But we hope you trust us, because we built this good relationship with you. Please help us." And they did, they went out there and helped us with the community.

The game didn't even work on the first day, like you couldn't log in at all. It was very, very broken. But we did deliver things, particularly in the first six months. Player-run cities with player-run governments, a pretty plausible galactic civil war, and a whole bunch of new innovations that made things feel more like a living world.

STAR WARS SANDBOX

Hairdressing in a galaxy far, far away

■ "People made fun of us in *Ultima Online* for having crafting," recalls Raph. "Competitors ran ads that were things like, 'Do you play games to bake bread, or do you play to crush?' And the answer was baking bread, it turned out. With *Galaxies*, it was, 'Why do you have hairdressing and dancing in this game?' A lot of people objected to what they called the Uncle Owen/Aunt Beru version of *Star Wars*, rather than it being the Luke Skywalker version of *Star Wars*. Of course, everyone being Luke Skywalker is a little bit incompatible with an MMO."

The sandbox freedom of *Star Wars Galaxies* inspired some remarkable creativity, like player-run beauty pageants. "The birth of machinima was happening around this time period, and a lot of the early machinima was music videos from *Galaxies*," adds Raph.

But he thinks that the release of *World Of Warcraft* saw this kind of gameplay fall out of fashion. "It caused a split between the people who dreamt of online worlds as alternate realities, and the people who 'just wanted a game, damn it'", he says. "And *WoW* made sure that the 'just a game' side won out for a very long time." However, that sandbox tradition ended up having an enormous impact on games, he adds, and today you can find it everywhere, from roleplay servers in *GTA V* to island parties in *Animal Crossing*.

» [PC] Wonder what hairstyles these Stormtroopers are rocking under their helmets.

And somehow around that time you managed to write a book…

I did! After I was promoted, I was chief creative officer at Sony Online, and I spent a lot of time doing milestone reviews, and running R&D projects, and doing pitches for Hollywood tie-ins that were never happening. And I was also really, really tired and burned out, and had a ridiculous amount of vacation time accrued. So I asked for permission to write a book based on a talk that I had given called *The Theory Of Fun*. It's basically a pop-science book about what exactly is fun, and why does it matter? What are games for?

It ended up being hugely influential, didn't it?

Yeah, which is sort of weird for a book that is half cartoons. But yes, it's usually named in the top three recommended books to read if you want to get into game development. And it still sells as well today as it ever has. I wouldn't be surprised if the book lasts so much longer than any of the games I've made.

What happened next in your career after the book?

After I left Sony Online, I did a start up called Metaplace, which was an attempt to build the metaverse. In a lot of ways it was more robust than *Roblox* is now: it had way less flashy graphics, but it interacted completely with the internet. You could run virtual storefronts in it, you could run classrooms in it, you could hook it up to learning systems. At peak, there were 70,000 user-built worlds, ranging from simple RPGs to platformers to combat games to social spaces.

But it never really caught on to the degree that I hoped. Disney acquired it, and it ended up being the back end for *Club Penguin* and a couple of dozen other games at Disney, mostly Facebook games and social games.

What happened after the social games?

I ended up doing six years of whatever I wanted: I did consulting, and I wrote music, and I put out a couple more books. I also worked with Google for a long time on what will happen when social gameplay is done using AR glasses. The other thing I did was a bunch of retro game emulation work on RetroPie for the Raspberry Pi. I helped out on the Atari emulator, I did some work on the various Commodore platforms, and I took over the Microvision emulator and made it nice and user friendly. But eventually, I got the itch to go back and make an MMO again, and that's what I'm doing now.

Can you tell us anything about it?

Since late 2018, I've been working at Playable Worlds, which is a new studio I cofounded in order to get back to that idea of building worlds that can be alternate realities. All those years ago when we said that online worlds could be more than just hack and slash? Time has proven us right, and the world is ready for that now. Now we can do all of the things that we were too naive to realise were impossible when we did *Ultima Online*.

» Raph founded Metaplace in 2006, an early attempt to create the metaverse. The Metaplace software platform allowed users to create their own worlds, similar to *Roblox*, although in 2D rather than 3D.

Rygar: The Legendary Adventure

A PS2 GAME THAT'S WII-LLY GOOD

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION 2 » 2002 » TECMO

Back in 2008 Tecmo released *Rygar: The Battle Of Argus* for Nintendo's Wii. It was an enhanced remake of Tecmo's earlier PS2 game, *Rygar: The Legendary Adventure* and I've owned it since release… and completed it once.

Recently, I bought a US copy of the original PS2 game, despite the fact that it was triple the price of the easily available PAL edition, which only runs at 50Hz, and is considered graphically inferior to the later Wii game (which I'll now be selling). Why did I do this? I'll tell you why – because I wanted to.

Sure the Wii version does look nice, but the original game is no slouch in the graphical department either and can look great when it's running on an OLED via a suitably powered upscaler like Mike Chi's RetroTink 5X. It also has far better controls than the Wii version, which can make a huge difference when playing an action game of *Rygar*'s calibre.

That's not to say that the Wii version is bad, but the PS2 outing gives you a level of control that's missing on Nintendo's console, where it feels like you're waving the Wii remote about like a mad man. (Maybe that's why I can't get on with it.)

Although it's incredibly short, clocking in at around the six-hour mark, there's plenty to enjoy about Tecmo's game. Your Diskarmor weapon is a genuinely versatile tool that can be used for both combat and traversing the lush environments, while there's a nice range of mythological monsters to take down, including some gargantuan bosses like the one shown here. 3D navigation is handled extremely well throughout and we wouldn't be surprised if Santa Monica Studio looked towards Tecmo's game while working on *God Of War* as they share several similar aspects when it comes to traversal.

I may have paid over the odds for my copy, but it's certainly staying in my collection. Now, does anyone want a copy of the Wii version?

RETRORATED

» The Atari 2600+ is wooing us with its woodgrain front and metal switches this month, but does it live up to the legacy of the original? Over the page, more fun awaits with Berzerk: Recharged, a Jurassic Park collection and the latest Evercade cartridges

✱PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Double Dragon Collection

Worth importing from Japan, if only because it's the cheapest way to officially enjoy *Double Dragon Advance*.

NICK

Atari 2600+

After last month's technical deep dive, I was hankering for some more time with the likes of *Warlords* and *Centipede*.

» The console looks very authentic, and the build quality feels worth the price tag.

Atari 2600+

IS THE FUN BACK?

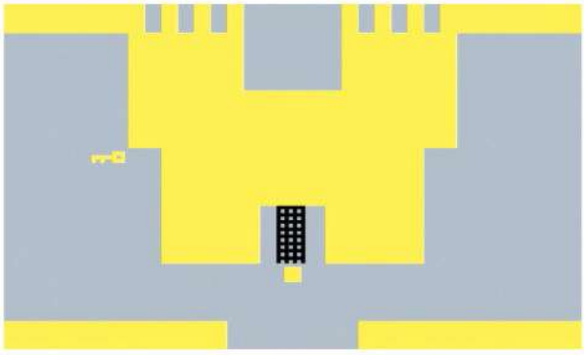
INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £99.99
- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **DEVELOPER:** PLAION
- **BUY IT FROM:** AMAZON

Officially licensed Atari retro consoles have been a staple of the retro-gaming scene for decades now, but the Atari 2600+ is a very different proposition. The console essentially represents a relaunch of the Atari 2600 and 7800 – it supports classic games for both systems, and Atari is supporting it with both newly manufactured games and peripherals.

The Atari 2600+ feels very faithful to the classic machine – it's a little smaller but is well constructed, with metal switches flanking the cartridge slot and a nice woodgrain front. In fact, beyond the USB-C power input and HDMI video connector, there are very few modern conveniences. The Atari logo lights up to show that the console is on and there's a switch to stretch the image to fill a 16:9 screen, but operating the console is otherwise exactly the same as it ever was, so you'll want the console within reach when playing in order to operate the Game Select and Game Reset switches.

In terms of control, the short throw and stiffness of the CX40+ joystick will feel extremely familiar to any Atari enthusiast. The



» [Atari 2600+] The PAL version of *Adventure* will look a little different on the Atari 2600+.

» [Atari 2600+] Paddles work just as on original hardware, and the new models handle very well.

» To support the console, Atari has also released two very enjoyable new 2600 cartridges. *Mr Run And Jump* is a simple but very challenging precision platformer, in which you chase a dog through five increasingly tough stages. *Berzerk: Enhanced Edition* updates the classic game with diagonal firing, bug fixes and impressive voice effects. Each game retails for £24.99 and comes with a box that will fit in with your other Atari 2600 games, as well as a cardboard slipcase. Instruction manuals aren't included though – given that these games are surely intended for collecting as much as playing, this comes as a surprise.

system only comes with one, but they're available separately for £19.99. The CX30+ paddle controller doesn't come with the system, but can be picked up for £29.99 with a four-in-one cartridge featuring *Breakout*, *Canyon Bomber*, *Night Driver* and *Video Olympics*. It feels slightly different to our rather knackered old paddles, a little less loose and arguably better for it. These new peripherals work perfectly on original hardware.

The Atari 2600+ uses the highly regarded Stella and ProSystem emulators, ensuring that games look and sound as good as they can. Both NTSC and PAL games are supported with appropriate colours and speed, as well as the expected squashed look for PAL games. One downside of this is that horizontal lines can look somewhat uneven when playing PAL games, as the original resolution doesn't scale up to the 720p output of the Atari 2600+ as well as NTSC does.

The console is packaged with a ten-in-one cartridge featuring *Adventure*, *Combat*, *Dodge 'Em*, *Haunted House*, *Maze Craze*, *Missile Command*, *RealSports Volleyball*, *Surround*, *Video Pinball* and *Yars' Revenge*. It's a mixed bag, with *Adventure*, *Missile Command* and *Yars' Revenge* being the highlights, but should be enough to get you started. The cartridge doesn't include the spring-loaded dust guard, but does come in a nice little cardboard slip case. We also tested dozens of vintage Atari 2600 and 7800 cartridges. Older cartridges with integrated dust guards tended to work with little complaint, but just about all of the open-ended ones needed a good clean with isopropyl alcohol before they would boot. All but one of the 2600 games we tested worked as expected, and our results matched the official compatibility list exactly. The majority of the 7800 cartridges we tested also worked in line with our expectations, and NTSC players should have few problems.

What doesn't work? The compatibility list advises that *RealSports Boxing* doesn't work, which we saw first hand. Unfortunately, *Pitfall II* isn't supported due to copyright issues around the DPC enhancement chip, and the excellent modern release *Circus Convoy* didn't work for us either. Our PAL 7800 copies of *Choplifter* and *Xevious* didn't work, and we've been advised that *Ballblazer*, *Commando*, *Food Fight*, *Joust*, *Karateka* and *Ms Pac-Man* also do not work at present.

What was more surprising was that certain peripherals didn't work. While original joysticks and paddles will work with the Atari 2600+, other official controllers from the system's original run including the Video Touch Pad for *Star Raiders* and the Keyboard Controller do not. Fortunately, the console does support firmware updates that can potentially expand compatibility, but our advice for now is to do some research if you're intending to use the console with newer homebrew games or less common accessories.

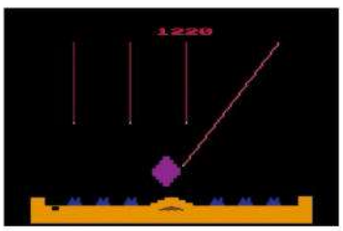
There are a few other things you should know, the biggest of which is that the cartridge bundled with the console is designed for NTSC systems, so it will work fine on the 2600+ but will display wrong colours on original PAL systems. The same goes for all of the other new Atari 2600 cartridges being brought to market with the console. Additionally, if you don't have an Atari 7800 controller handy, you'll need to buy one for any 7800 games that use two fire buttons.

Is the Atari 2600+ for you? If you're expecting an all-in-one curated experience or modern features like save states, rewinding or scanline filters, the answer is no. This is a system for existing or aspiring Atari collectors who want an authentic, tactile experience, without the inconvenience of dealing with RF video and dodgy old power supplies. If that's what you're after, this does the job and with a couple of caveats, does it well. ✱

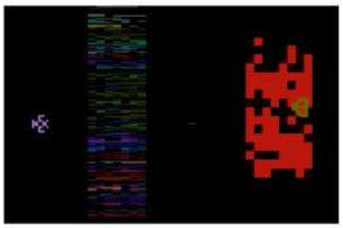
» [Atari 2600+] *Video Pinball* is one of the weaker games on the pack-in cart, but offers some fun.

In a nutshell

A worthy way to bring Atari's classic console into the HDMI realm. We hope firmware updates can iron out the remaining wrinkles.



» [Atari 2600+] *Missile Command* is still brilliant fun, and it's included on the pack-in cartridge.



» [Atari 2600+] *Yars' Revenge* is a great choice. We're pleased to see on the pack-in cartridge.

» [Atari 2600+] The opportunity to play Atari 7800 games, like *Crack'd* here, doesn't come around often.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade Multi Game Cartridges

» **System:** Evercade » **Buy it for:** £17.99 each » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

We've two releases to look at this month, *Full Void* and *Home Computer Heroes Collection 1*.

Full Void is a big deal for Blaze Entertainment, as it's the very first time it has released an Evercade cartridge containing a single game. It's certainly a brave move and while *Full Void* does look lovely it doesn't feel like a strong enough release on its own. That's not to say it's not good though, as there's a lot to appreciate about OutOfTheBit's first non-mobile release.

It looks absolutely beautiful with stunning animation, atmospheric sound and gorgeous pixel art. Mechanically it's very similar to titles like *Another World* and sees your young protagonist making their way through a dystopian landscape solving puzzles with the help of a droid they team up with.

» Score **70%**

Unfortunately, it's extremely easy and you'll breeze through the game in less than two hours.

Home Computer Heroes Collection 1 is the micro equivalent to Blaze's console series and while there's some good games here, the overall quality isn't as high as those earlier releases. Highlights include *Attack Of The PETSCII Robots*, a challenging action game, the first-person shooter *Citadel Remonstered*, the strategy gem *Planet X2* and MSX platformer *The Sword Of Ianna*. *Tanks Furry* is an OK blaster that's best with multiple players, while *Bridge Strike* is a weak *River Raid* clone. That leaves *Farming Simulator: C64 Edition*, a demake of *Farming Simulator 17* (which you get a free Steam code for). The good games here will keep you busy for ages, meaning you'll be returning to this long after you've finished with *Full Void*.

» Score **74%**

» [Evercade] *Full Void* is a charming adventure and like *Home Computer Heroes Collection 1*, played perfectly fine on both the EXP and Evercade VS.

» [Evercade] The emulation of all games on *Home Computer Heroes Collection 1* feels great. This is *Attack Of The PETSCII Robots*.

Berzerk: Recharged

» **System:** Switch (tested), PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £8.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

We've enjoyed the vast amount of *Recharged* games and this is another good buy. Although it now features modernised controls like twin-stick shooting and a variety of power-ups, it still feels like the original arcade classic. You've still got plenty of enemy robots to take out and Evil Otto will still pursue you relentlessly if you dawdle too long. Shooting enemies increases your score multiplier and you can even forgo bonuses to boost your final score. You'll spend most of your time in Arcade mode, but the Missions mode is also fun, requiring you to clear 20 stages of a set number of enemies. The end result is another enjoyable addition to the series.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **76%**

Quarter Arcades: Space Invaders Part II

» **Buy it for:** £249.99 » **Buy it from:** numskull.com

As impressed as we are with Numskull's latest cab it comes with a rather high price tag. Modern production costs mean it's nearly double the price of previous cabs in the range, which we feel pushes it out of reach of all but the most hardcore of fans. It's easy to see where that money has gone though. The build quality is staggering, with durable parts which feel extremely authentic and there's a lovely weight to the cabinet itself. It's bolstered by stunning artwork and top-notch emulation (as well as useful difficulty settings). What a pity then that the much-lauded pepper's ghost effect feels rather underwhelming, which destroys the game's distinct effect somewhat (or maybe we've set our expectations too high). This is arguably the best-looking and most impressive cabinet in Numskull's entire series, but the high price means it's not going to be for everyone.

DARRAN JONES

Jurassic Park: Classic Games Collection

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, PC » **Buy it for:** £26.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

This collection comprises seven *Jurassic Park* games from the NES, SNES, Game Boy and Mega Drive, which are top-down and side-scrolling action games that were moderately to rather well received in their day. The games are well emulated and it's nice to have access to save states, a CRT filter and a rewind function, and the in-game maps are a great idea. The music players are good but extras are otherwise lacking, and digital manuals aren't included – perhaps because a printed one is included with the limited-edition physical versions. It's a mixed bag, but if you liked the deadly dinosaurs 30 years ago you'll have fun now.

NICK THORPE

» Score **75%**

★ ON SALE NOW! ★

Journey across the world of Pokémon

Celebrate everything Pokémon has to offer with this essential compendium. Visit each region and re-live iconic adventures from the series' past and present. Plus, meet every monster, delve into the trading card game and much more!

retro GAMER PRESENTS
ULTIMATE FAN'S GUIDE TO
POKÉMON
100% UNOFFICIAL
INSIDE EVERY POKÉMON IN THE POKÉDEX
SAFARI ZONE
Get up close and personal with iconic monsters
ANIME ADVENTURES
Explore the journey of Ash Ketchum and beyond
CLASH OF CARDS
Everything you need to know about the trading card game
EVERY REGION EXPLORED • DEFINING GAMES • ESSENTIAL TRAINER TIPS

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

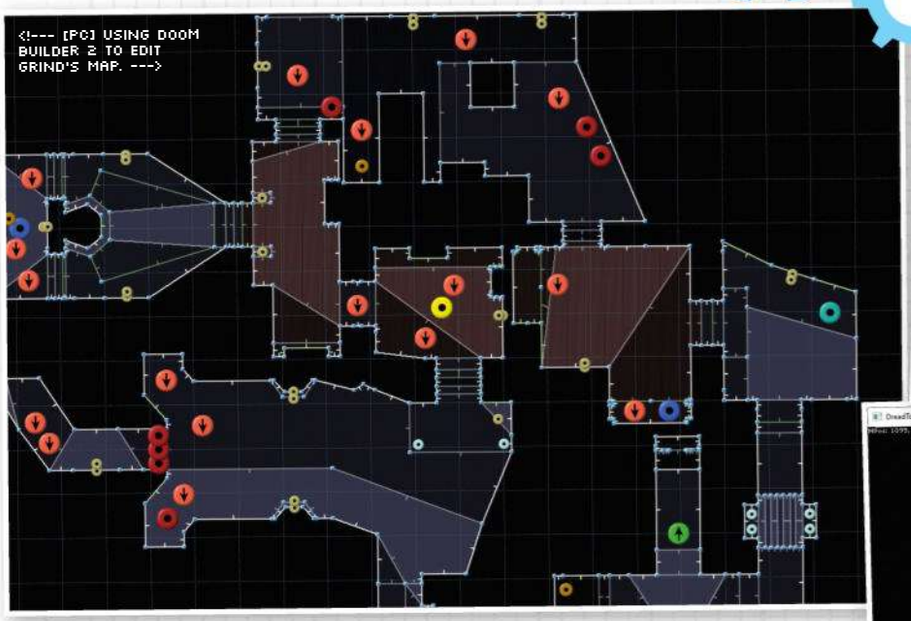
WWW.MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

FUTURE

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<INTRO> AFTER LAST MONTH'S ABSENCE DUE TO MAJOR SURGERY, ANDREW IS BACK TO THE GRIND – WITH A MASSIVE UPDATE ON AN IMPORTANT AMIGA FPS THAT IS ALSO COMING TO OTHER 16-BIT FORMATS, MORE PROJECTS FROM ANDY VAISEY (AS FEATURED IN RG252) AND THE PREVIEW OF A NEW STRATEGY GAME FOR THE NES. FOR THE REVIEWS, WE GO ON A GAME BOY COLOR ADVENTURE, PARK SOME TRAFFIC, AND JUMP INTO A PETSCII WORLD. ENJOY. </INTRO>

<!--- [AMIGA] HERE WE COMPARE THE DREAD CHAINGUN ENEMY (TOP) WITH GRIND'S UPDATED VERSION (BOTTOM). --->

<MAIN HEADER>

GREAT GRINDING

<INTRO> JOHN ROMERO FAMOUSLY SAID THE AMIGA "COULD NOT DO DOOM". JOHN TSAKIRIS (TSAK/PIXELGLASS) IS PROVING HIM WRONG WITH GRIND </INTRO>

<BODY> **We originally mentioned John Tsakiris' involvement with the *Dread* project in RG230, but after its first public demo, a problem arose.** "KK/Altair's new job came with a non-compete clause: forcing him to disband the team, continue alone (no external help) and make the project non-profit," John explains. "Our plan was a commercial game with original assets and a steampunk/Lovecraftian direction. To secure the project, we decided to split it. KK passed me the source code to continue the project as *Grind*, while he would continue solo on the *Dread* engine and a possible new, free title."

John admits to having a lengthy list of influences. "I have always been a major fan of steampunk," he says, explaining they wanted to move away from the generic space-marine theme. "The Lovecraftian part was KK's idea and I loved it, as the mix of the two gave us more room for artistic expression. The connection to *The Chaos Engine* is indisputable. Dan Malone's art has influenced my own pixel-art style. The same can be said about *Darkmere*, especially the current level textures." John also mentions the recent Amiga game *Aquabyss* (which he worked on), as well as *BioShock*, *Chasm*, *Exhumed* and the classic PC FPS *Blood*.

Grind's weapons also have a familiar look. "I plan to play it safe with the four weapons *Dread* had – the Pistol, Shotgun, Chaingun and Missile Launcher," John says. "I also want to include secondary firing modes (via RMB), which will expand the strategic possibilities. If time and memory permits, I would not be against bringing in some unique extra weapon or more powerful replacements late game."

Grind has taken a year so far, building on *Dread*'s two years of development. "The project is primarily done with the tools KK created for *Dread*, the engine uses VBCC, while compiling is done via Visual Studio," explains John. "Maps are designed with

FIRST-PERSON FUN

DOOM
Atari XL

<Modder was inspired by Kweepa's superb VIC-20 version and unleashed this conversion in 2023, bringing reworked levels and familiar enemies. />

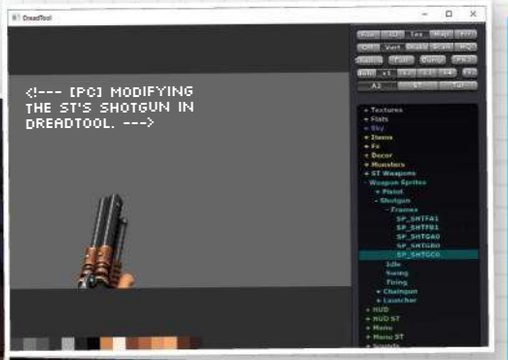
GREY
C64

<Piotor Kozka's chunky-looking FPS has had multiple previews so far, adding new features, music and weapons (including the infamous chainsaw). />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [AMIGA] TEXTURES AND OBJECTS IN GRIND ADD TO THE ATMOSPHERE, WITH AN ENEMY VISIBLE AROUND THE CORNER. --->



<!--- [PC] MODIFYING THE ST'S SHOTGUN IN DREADTOOL. --->

<!--- [AMIGA] THIS IS ONE OF THE NEW ELDRITCH CREATURES GIVING GRIND A COMPLETELY DISTINCTIVE LOOK AND FEEL. --->

<!--- A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE AMIGA (TOP) AND ST (BOTTOM) VERSIONS OF THE DEMO MAP'S COURTYARD AREA. --->

<!--- [AMIGA] HERE'S HOW DREAD'S MENUS EVOLVED INTO GRIND'S FRESH LOOK. --->

Doom Builder 2. I use Wavelab and Protracker for the sound and Photoshop for the pixel art." While John is creating all the graphics, sounds, gameplay, and map design, he's not alone. "BSzili takes care of the Amiga code (helping with the ST version as well), Kabuto from Titan is preparing the Mega Drive version, and there are several other coders and artists that contribute; musician DMA-SC has provided music for the ST version so far."

The current goal for *Grind* is the end of 2024, with ways to get involved. "Anyone who wants to help with funding and getting frequent updates can join our Patreon: patreon.com/Grind_Amiga," says John. "Fans who'd like the latest news, and to talk directly to the developers, can join our Discord: bit.ly/grind-discord Coders, artists or map designers who want to contribute or propose a co-operation can mail us via pixelglass.org" With the newly announced Mega Drive version fresh in our mind, we look forward to playing *Grind*. </BODY>

<!--- [PC ENGINE] VIOLET ZAPS AN ENEMY IN THE STRIFE SISTERS DEMO. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

Amiga: Superb shoot-'em-up *Reshoot Proxima 3* (see **RG**238's interview) is now available. Head to bit.ly/rp3-amiga

Amstrad CPC: You can check out the numerous entries to CPCRetroDev 2023 by visiting bit.ly/cpcdev2023

Atari: VHZX Games released the *Game Of The Bear* puzzle-platformer trilogy (first two on 2600, third game on 7800) and *Ninjish Guy In Low-Res World* (also 2600) via vhzc.itch.io/

BBC Micro: *Bop7* by Tom Nash is based on the mobile hit *Drop 7*. Try it at bit.ly/bop7-bbc

Commander X16: Jimbo released a trilogy of his PETSCII conversions – *Portal, Space Invaders 2* and *Side-Scrolling Platformer* (see Databurst) – at jimbo.itch.io

Mega Drive: TheRoboZ (see **RG**243) released the demo version of *Mega R-Type* with three levels, two ships and extra options. You can play it at bit.ly/mega-rtype

PC Engine: Check out strategy RPG *Strife Sisters* (pictured above). Cartridges are available at strifesisters.com

PICO-8: The ambitious *Half-Life* demake *Pico-Life* from Taxi Comics is free to play in your browser. You can find it at bit.ly/pico-life

PLUS/4: TCFS, Csabo, Murphy and Unreal cast a spell on Halloween to convert *Cauldron II: The Pumpkin Strikes Back*. You can play it at bit.ly/cauldron2-plus4

VIC-20: Marco Giorgini crammed a *Rogue*-style game into just 3.5K (but it requires a disk drive). You can name your price and buy it from bit.ly/roguish-vic20

ZX Spectrum: Solve a mystery with Fusillo Productions in *Area 51: The Roswell Incident* for 48K machines. Visit bit.ly/area51-zx for more information.

<INTRO> RECENT HOMEBREW FPS DEVELOPMENTS TO CHECK OUT </INTRO>

DOOM

ZX SPECTRUM 128K

Digital Reality's *Doom* conversion demo has been transferred from TR-DOS to TZX by Mario Viegas, meaning more people can enjoy it.

THE RED SERPENT INVASION

C64

TRSI dropped this impressive demo version at the Evoke 2022 party, with a built-in ray caster for a 40-year-old computer.

DOOM II: SLAYER EDITION

Atari Jaguar

Recently previewed by ZeroPage, Jaguar fans will be getting reworked editions of the original, *Doom II* and *Heretic* with enhancements.

CHAMPION CODER

ANDY VAISEY

<INTRO> AFTER REVEALING CHILL3R IN RG252, ANDY IS BACK WITH THE AMIGA PUZZLE GAME SPHEROID </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: WALES WEBSITE: ARKANIXLABS.ITCH.IO/SPHEROID (ON RELEASE), ANDYVAISEY.ITCH.IO FORMAT: AMIGA, C64 PREVIOUS GAME: CHILLER 2, LOST REALMS OF MURKASADA 2 (C64) WORKING ON: SPHEROID (AMIGA, C64), CHILL3R (C64) />

WHAT INSPIRED SPHEROID?

<Around 1988 in C64 *SEUCK*, I made a simple maze of coloured blocks that you moved a metal ball around, some blocks being safe and some causing you to die. That transferred over to the Amiga around 1990 when I bought AMOS and went through additions and improvements. I stopped around 1993, knee deep in A-levels.

In 2022, I finally got round to resurrecting my A1200 – it booted first time. Mounting a drive image in WinUAE, I found the source and assets – however, the code would not run. I spent a couple of days relearning Blitz Basic 2 and began coding the game from scratch, with the game engine finished in a few days. I added additional elements not in the original. Some graphical and sound assets remain as they were, pixelled and sampled over 30 years ago!

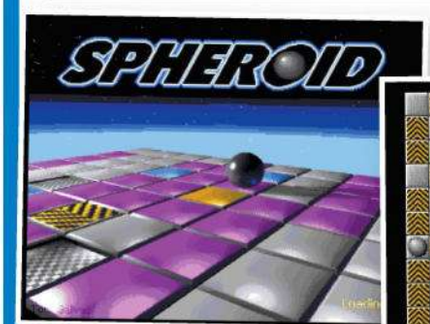
HOW DID YOU DESIGN THE LEVELS?

<Originally, levels were designed in Deluxe Paint, cutting and pasting tile images. I noted the positions of the tiles and manually typed the information into data statements. A bit laborious! Ray Lejuez of Arkanix Labs then made me a level editor in Python. Although I was still typing level data in, designing became simple and quick; some devious levels only took ten to fifteen minutes to design.

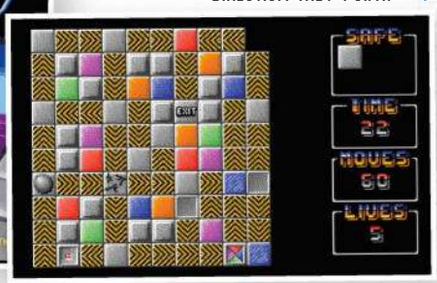
Even my eldest grandson got in on the act and designed a few levels himself, which are in the game. I made him type in the level data manually – he is learning to code, so it was all practice really! My youngest grandson has been successfully testing and enjoying the levels produced. As he is only four, I am hoping the game will appeal to a wide audience.

AND THE C64 SPHEROID?

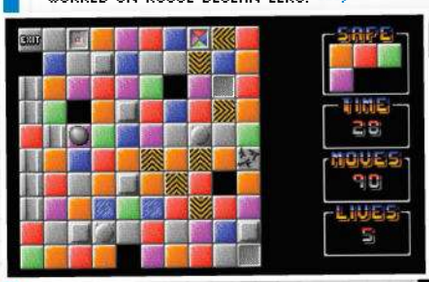
<It's about 15-20% complete – most graphics are complete and some of the game engine is done. There will also be a PC port, with code and music by me, and graphics by Toni Galvez.



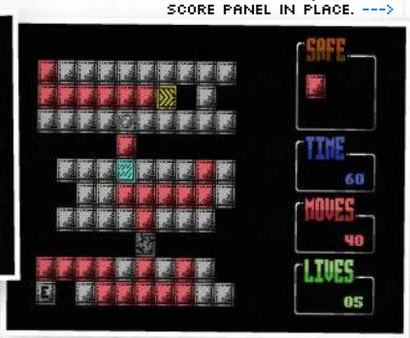
<!--- [AMIGA] THE SPHEROID LOADING SCREEN BY TONY GALVEZ, WHO ALSO WORKED ON ROGUE DECLAN ZERO. --->



<!--- [AMIGA] THE ARROWS ARE CONVEYOR BELTS THAT PUSH THE SPHEROID IN THE DIRECTION THEY POINT. --->



<!--- [AMIGA] THE SCORE PANEL TELLS YOU WHICH COLOURS ARE SAFE, BUT THE COLOUR SWITCH (TOP RIGHT) WILL ALTER TILES. --->



<!--- [C64] EARLY PROGRESS ON THE C64 VERSION, WITH THE SCORE PANEL IN PLACE. --->

DATA BURST

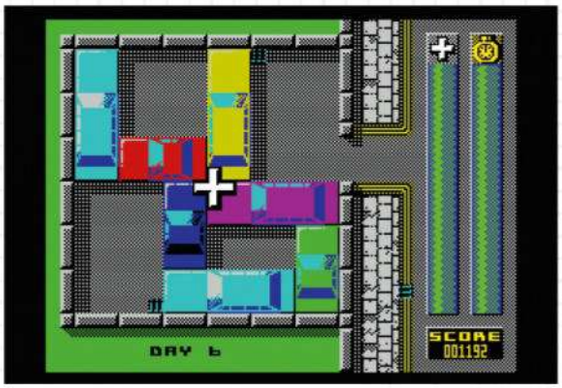
GRIDLOCK/JAM!

<INFO FORMAT: GRIDLOCK (C64), JAM! (SPECTRUM 48K) CREDITS: CHRIS STANLY & MEGASTYLE (C64), CLIVE TOWNSEND &TEKNAMIC (SPECTRUM) PRICE: GRIDLOCK TBC, JAM €1.99 (DIGITAL) / €9.90 (TAPE WITH GYPSY TAROT BONUS GAME) WEB: MEGASTYLE.ITCH.IO/ AND TEKNAMIC.ITCH.IO/JAM />

<BODY> **Following each other like traffic, these two variations on the *Rush Hour* board game (devised by Japanese inventor Nobuyuki Yoshigahara) were created by veteran coders returning to their early machines.** *Jam!* appeared as a mobile-phone game from Clive in 2003, and crams more than 40 levels into the 48K Spectrum. *Gridlock* splits its 80 levels into 10 days loaded from disk, with multiple tunes and save points (initially every four levels, then every two levels as it gets harder). The aim is simple – move your vehicle out of the car park to the street on the right. But you can only move the cars blocking you either horizontally or vertically, depending on which way they are facing, as you race against the timer. Later levels add large limos and trucks that take up three squares, making for some tricky puzzling. *Gridlock*'s gorgeous Spectrum graphics impress, with a neat loading screen, and both versions have a clever cursor that changes shape to help you. The C64 version's extra tunes, medals for completing levels, and storyline (a paramedic in training must get his ambulance out for a call) are additional neat additions. Puzzle fans will adore this – now who is going to tackle the Amstrad version? </BODY>

SCORE: 88%

<!--- [C64] MOVING UP FROM BEGINNER TO ROOKIE ON DAY 2 OF GRIDLOCK. --->



NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] ITEMS, MAGIC AND SPECIAL SKILLS ALL HELP YOU WIN FIGHTS. --->

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] YOUR MOTHER SENDS YOU ON YOUR WAY, ONCE YOU HAVE PICKED UP YOUR TRUSTY SPEAR. --->

DRAGONHYM

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: SPACEBOT INTERACTIVE (DEVELOPER), INCUBOS GAMES (PUBLISHER) PRICE: $14.99 (DIGITAL), $59.99 (STANDARD), $99.99 (COLLECTOR'S EDITION) WEB: INCUBOSGAMES.COM />

<BODY> **The land of Archend lived in peace for many years after five dragons were sealed away.** The legendary dragon hunter Kurtis is now missing, meaning his son Kris must find his father and stop the dragons from escaping again. Reminiscent of *Link's Awakening*, *Dragonhym* is a gorgeous-looking game with a handy map system to help find your way around the large world. Interacting with NPCs and enemies can reveal new quests, Secret Grottoes hide optional Challenges to test your skills, and mysterious Altars can be activated. Encountering an enemy starts a neat *Pokémon*-style battle section, with Experience Points levelling up your character. With excellent music and sound and great boxed editions, this is another worthy addition to your portable library. </BODY>

SCORE: 90%

<!--- [COMMODORE PET] THE OPENING OF WORLD 1-1 WILL LOOK REMARKABLY FAMILIAR. --->

<!--- [COMMODORE PET] PICKING UP THE CLUB SYMBOL GIVES YOU THE POWER OF FIREBALLS. --->

PETSCII SIDE-SCROLLING PLATFORMER

<INFO FORMAT: PET (32K REQUIRED, TESTED), COMMANDER X16 CREDITS: JIMBO PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: JIMBO.ITCH.IO/PETSCII-SIDE-SCROLLING-PLATFORMER />

<BODY> **Jimbo impresses once more with a side-scrolling platformer inspired by *Super Mario Bros*, pushing PETSCII and the PET to its limits.** Run through the levels, pick up coins, find power-ups hidden in bricks and even stomp on a turtle to kick its shell around. Hidden rooms, Piranha Plants, pipes and the flagpole are all present and correct, with a handy starting level selection. The keyboard controls take a little getting used to, but you can use the SNES pad through the Texelec interface. It's great fun for the ancient machine. </BODY>

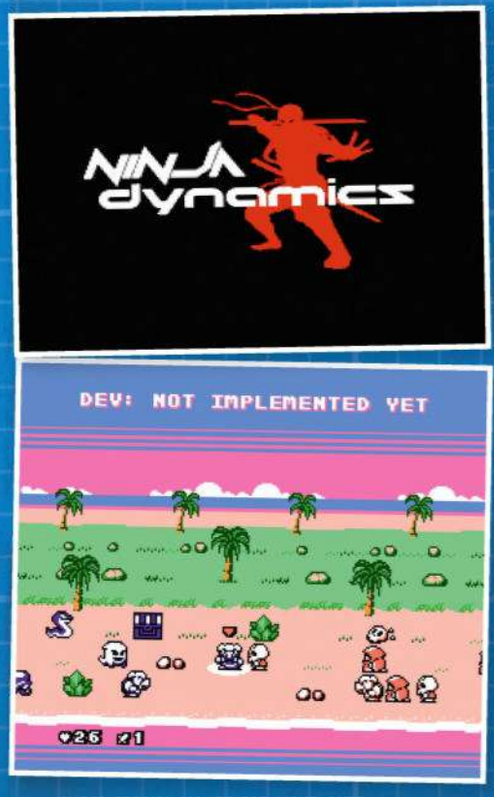
SCORE: 82%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> NINJA DYNAMICS IS BRINGING TURN-BASED TACTICAL RPG SUMMER ISLAND BATTLE TACTICS TO THE NES </INTRO>

<BODY> **"My main inspirations are the *Front Mission* and *XCOM* series,"** says developer Wonder about the incoming ***Summer Island Battle Tactics***. "I'm aiming to create a unique visual experience. It takes place on a tropical island across several locations and times of day – battles take place at sunrise, midday, sunset and midnight. Not everything is planned in advance. One thing I know is that the game will feature a cocktail bar – it will play a significant role between missions."

The game is being written in C using 8bitworkshop online IDE, with graphics created in NEXXT using Python scripts and Photoshop. "For coding assistance, I know I can always count on my buddy ChatGPT (GPT4) and the NESDev community," Wonder tells us. But when can we expect the game? "If I manage to complete the game engine before the end of the year, I'd like to release it in the summer of 2024," says Wonder. "I used to develop for Android, but I've completely dropped it in favour of NES development. I had a NES (Famiclone) as a kid and I've always imagined creating my own game." </BODY>



<!--- [NES] SPECIAL MOVES FOR YOUR CUTE CHARACTERS STILL NEED TO BE IMPLEMENTED. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [Dreamcast] Games like *Jet Set Radio* effortlessly highlighted the power of Sega's console.

DREAMCAST MEMORIES

The team reminisce about Sega's final console

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Sega's last console is now 25 years old and still appears to be in rude health. Tim, Nick and Darran look back at Sega's last roll of the dice and what it meant to them.

DARRAN

So what's your earliest Dreamcast memory?

TIM

Playing *Crazy Taxi* on a demo pod at HMV in Belfast, then realising I'd never be able to buy a Dreamcast as I was a starving student at the time.

NICK

I'd been whipped into a frenzy of hype by *CVG*'s enthusiastic coverage, so when I first saw a demo pod in my local Toys R Us running the *Sonic Adventure* E3 demo, I monopolised it for half an hour or so. Other kids were probably really mad. I couldn't have cared less.

DARRAN

I remember seeing the Japanese version of *Sonic Adventure* running in Joypad, a local game shop. It looked incredible, but I never bought one at launch. I'm assuming you did, Nick.

NICK

I wish, but I'd only got a PlayStation the year before. It wasn't too long before I got one, by convincing my mum that the internet access would help me with my homework.

DARRAN

I bet it didn't help with your homework, but it did help with your *Chu Chu Rocket* high scores…

NICK

I might have run up some hefty bills playing that. The homework argument backfired on me, as I had to stop playing to let my sister go online for her homework.

DARRAN

See, I missed the online side of it, largely because of the cost of using it. One of my friends would get charged £300 to £500 a month playing *Phantasy Star Online*. I know you didn't own one Tim, but you must have enjoyed its many fighters.

TIM

I did really want one, but I'd spent all my birthday money a couple of years before the Dreamcast came out on a PlayStation and couldn't justify (or afford) it. That feeling increased when I saw *Dead Or Alive 2*, probably in that same HMV.

DARRAN

Man, that really felt like a step up in terms of fidelity. As did *Soulcalibur*.

NICK

Oh yeah, I remember playing that in Comet for the first time and being blown away by it, as I was a fan of *Soul Blade* already. I used to have great nights with friends playing that, *Power Stone*, *Street Fighter III* and *Ultimate Fighting Championship*. It's a fighting fan's dream, pun very much intended.

DARRAN

Did you play much of *Soulcalibur* at Porthminster, Tim? Or weren't you living there then?

TIM

Soulcalibur was out way before I lived in Porthminster, heck I went to Japan to preview *Soulcalibur IV* while residing in the gaming flat. What did you think of Sega's first-party games? Best *Sonic*, Nick?

» [Dreamcast] We're pretty confident that this setpiece sold a lot of Dreamcasts back in the day.

> "I love Sonic Adventure but it's not the best one, that's for sure"
> NICK THORPE

NICK
I love *Sonic Adventure* but it's not the best one, that's for sure. Being a big fan of arcade games, it was great to go into Sega Park for an early chance to try games like *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Tennis*. I think it's fair to say the various teams were on a creative hot streak with games like *Jet Set Radio*, *Space Channel 5* and *Shenmue*, though some may disagree with that last one.

DARRAN
I loved the sheer amount of arcade experiences on the machine, but I do feel like others didn't want the same thing. *Shenmue* was obviously one of its biggest games, but I couldn't get on with it at all.

NICK
What was it about *Shenmue* that you didn't gel with?

DARRAN
It was so hyped up. I remember reading all the previews with all the FREE talk (Full Reactive Eyes Entertainment) and it never lived up to that promise for me. When you start off in Ryo's home it feels amazing because you can interact with virtually everything, but as you move further away its scope becomes more limited. Whenever I start either game I get as far as the first arcade and never get any further.

TIM
I finished *Shenmue 2* (on the Xbox) and it was a bit of a pain in the arse. And after battling through all the leaf catching, book balancing and fork-lift driving… you get that ending. I was so pissed off, furious even.

NICK
Yeah, those are fair criticisms. I love the games, but they're certainly not for everyone. I still gave *Shenmue II* 10/10 on my website, which got a little attention back in the day for covering late-era imports, mostly shoot-'em-ups. Did you ever play any of those?

» [Dreamcast] Darran and Nick might not agree on *Shenmue*, but they both love its arcade.

DARRAN
Well I obviously bought lots of the shmups. In fact, I can still remember being on the train and looking at my copy of *Psyvariar 2* from Lik-Sang. It felt like that genre was largely keeping the machine going back then. Now we seem to be in something of a renaissance, which I'm guessing makes Nick very happy.

NICK
Massively so. Some very good games have launched in recent years, like *Intrepid Izzy* and *Xeno Crisis*, and it's great to be able to play games online again.

TIM
At one point didn't you try to get a complete Dreamcast game collection, Darran?

DARRAN
I did Tim and I was about 33 games short. I remember telling Mel that I nearly had them all and she simply said, "Who cares?" I kind of agreed with her and sold virtually all of them.

NICK
She was right. Nobody needs to possess a copy of *ECW Hardcore Revolution*.

» [Dreamcast] Tim was very impressed with *Dead Or Alive 2* on release. If we're honest, it still looks great today.

» [Dreamcast] Arcade games like *Crazy Taxi* often had great extras to make them more appealing to gamers at home.

» [Dreamcast] *Power Stone* is a superb fighting game that really deserves a HD remake.

REMEMBERING THE DREAMCAST

Readers share their favourite Dreamcast memories

Chris Jowett
Playing *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast kiosk in Toys R Us when I should have been at work! What an amazing machine!

Lorfarius
Buying it on launch, going home and being amazed at the visuals in *Echo The Dolphin*... it was like real life!

Ashley Pallett
Going to Curry's to play *Sega Bass Fishing* with the fishing rod controller.

Odd Pod
One of mine is using the capsule toy machine in *Shenmue* and being amazed. It felt like I could do anything in the game.

thin beast bones
Playing through *Skies Of Arcadia* with my sister. She'd do all the role-playing bits, and I'd take over for the battles.

dave
It has to be *The House Of The Dead 2*, with the lightgun, jerky cutscenes, and truly terrible voice acting. I spent many an hour enjoying that game.

AndyKurosaki
Power Stone 2 was the first Dreamcast game I saw in action, at my mate's house. An evening of that convinced me to spend my student loan on getting my own Dreamcast.

John Miller
Being blown away by *Crazy Taxi*. It was the moment that consoles caught up with the arcades.

TheSegaDreamKev
Away from the gaming and console side, it was seeing the name and brand over the footy kits, specifically Arsenal as a UK fan. That felt cool as a Dreamcast owner and footy fan.

EvenLessGravitas
Looking around for sailors, obviously.

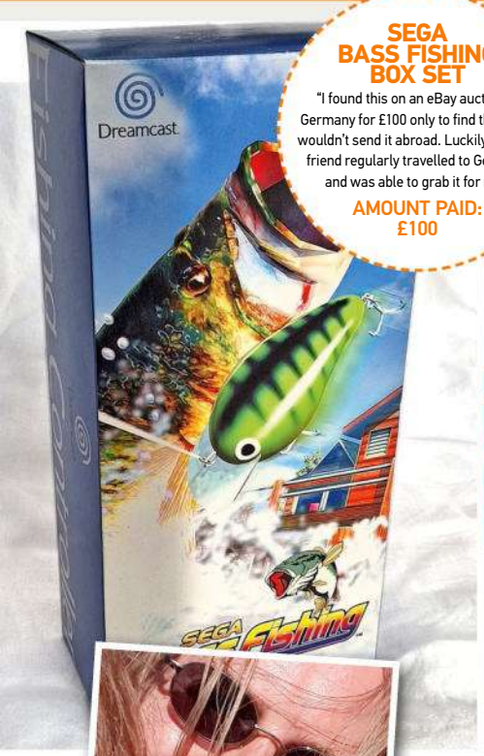
John Koconis
Seeing *NFL 2K* for the first time in the store and thinking it looked exactly like a real football broadcast.

Carleton Handley
Zed Two staff clearing out Game Manchester's stock of *Bangai-O* when they reduced it to a tenner. The company had bought every member of staff a Dreamcast as an Xmas present the year before.

John Maguire
Filling in some form online and Sega sending me a free copy of *Chu Chu Rocket*. I assumed it'd be rubbish since it was free but it turned out to be a cracking wee puzzler.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



SEGA BASS FISHING BOX SET

"I found this on an eBay auction in Germany for £100 only to find the seller wouldn't send it abroad. Luckily another friend regularly travelled to Germany and was able to grab it for me."

AMOUNT PAID: £100

PIER SOLAR COLLECTOR'S EDITION

"This is one of my favourite items as I designed the players' guide. Only 2,500 copies were ever produced which makes it very collectable."

AMOUNT PAID: £60

BIO

NAME:
Ben Boyd

LOCATION:
Northern Ireland

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
Dreamcast £10K, overall collection £50K

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Dreamcast

FAVOURITE GAME:
Sonic The Hedgehog 2

CASTING THE DREAMS

How a nightmare turned into a dream for our latest collector

For Ben Boyd, his gaming life started with the Atari 2600, but it was his love for Sega that started his love for collecting. "Christmas Day 1991, I received my first Sega system, the mighty Mega Drive," he tells us. "This is when I started growing up and from this point on, I was mad for Sega. Naturally, my next console was the Saturn, and I stuck with and championed the Saturn through its lifespan." You may guess what happened next. "When the Dreamcast came along, it finally felt like this was something that I could rally behind and not be questioned as to why," Ben continues. "Everyone thought it was a fantastic piece of kit. Sega did everything right in my eyes. The games looked and sounded amazing, and the console was robust and felt well made. This was also the era when I was working and had money to buy the games that I wanted, I was finally in a position where I could have an impressive game library. For better or worse the Dreamcast made me a collector."

It hasn't all been plain sailing though as Ben has lost his collection on two occasions. "The first time was through my own stupidity," he admits. "I didn't have a lot of room when I first started collecting so I kept my games in two large wallets. A friend borrowed them as he had friends around his house. I agreed and rather than tell him to choose a couple of games, I handed him over both full wallets with the express condition that he bring them back tomorrow. The next day he forgot to bring my Dreamcast and games, so we went to his home together to get them. When we pulled up to his house, we quickly saw that his front door had been kicked in and ripped off the hinges. My heart sank, I knew what I would find inside but hoped against hope. His house had been ransacked, my collection was gone, and the culprits weren't found, even though the police said they had their suspicions."

Ben started to rebuild his collection but had to put it into storage during a house move. "At some point, there had been flooding which penetrated the outhouse. It was missed due to the number of things stored hiding the fact that water was leaking. My entire Dreamcast, Saturn and Mega Drive collection was destroyed. All the discs were fine but anything that contained paper or card had rotted away and the smell was awful. I slowly started collecting again for the third time and I eventually completed my PAL Dreamcast collection for a fraction of the cost of my previous two collections."

Now that Ben is able to enjoy his complete collection of games, we asked him what makes the Dreamcast community so special. "It's the thousands of like-minded people who never gave up on the Dreamcast, even after Sega did," he says. "It's the homebrew community keeping the system alive with new games every year that get better and better. Maybe it's down to the hard work of the gaming journalists who never let the dream die. Many things make the community special but nothing I can quite put my finger on and say for certain."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

PREMIERE DISC

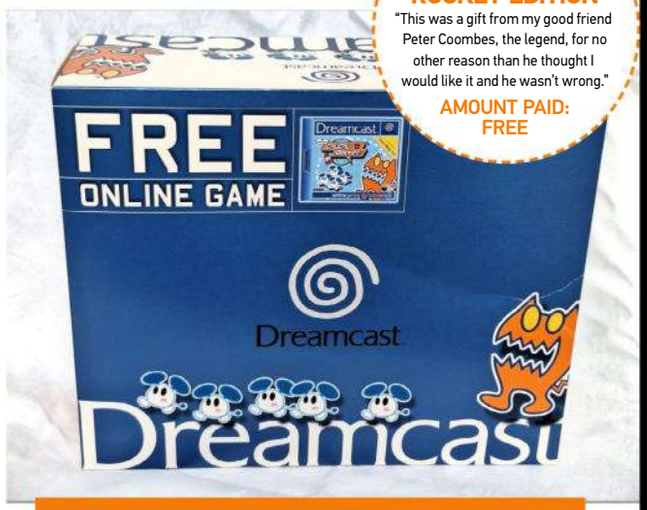
"A promotional disc for upcoming Dreamcast games which came with a second disc of demos and a full-colour booklet. I had spent years trying to acquire it until a chance sale on a Facebook group."

AMOUNT PAID: £50

DREAMCAST BOX: CHU CHU ROCKET EDITION

"This was a gift from my good friend Peter Coombes, the legend, for no other reason than he thought I would like it and he wasn't wrong."

AMOUNT PAID: FREE



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DREAMCAST KIOSK

■ "This is something I'd always wanted but this one was in terrible condition. I bought it and set about restoring it, which took an entire summer."

PAID: £60 + A FURTHER £170 ON RESTORATION

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

DREAMCAST

Sega's console has risen in price over the last few years. Finding a nice, boxed PAL version is becoming much harder and will set you back **£160.** You can get a used boxed one for **£100,** while a loose console can be picked up for **£65.**

COMANCHE: MAXIMUM OVERKILL

While a great condition boxed copy that had all the extra paperwork sold for **£33** recently, you should be able to grab a decent boxed one for under **£25.**

URIDIUM

Andrew Braybrook's C64 hit has a few different versions to look for. A floppy-disk copy will cost over **£60,** while cassette tapes start at **£15** and can reach **£20.**

POWER STRIKE

This classic Compile shooter is a popular choice with good condition boxed copies, complete with the manual going for over **£70.** Used ones go for over **£40,** while loose carts sell for **£15.**

JAMES POND 2: CODENAME ROBOCOD

This one is reasonably priced considering the series' popularity. Good, boxed copies range from **£15** to **£23.** The budget version can be found for under **£15.**

SPELLBOUND DIZZY

It's hard to imagine a *Dizzy* game on the ZX Spectrum being rare but a recent copy sold for **£97.** Fortunately, *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*, which includes *Spellbound Dizzy*, rarely hits **£30.**

STAR WARS GALAXIES

Prices for this depend on what version you buy. A later release with the *Empire Divided* add-on can be bought for **£15,** while the original game is upwards of **£30.**

RYGAR: THE LEGENDARY ADVENTURE

If you don't mind playing in 50Hz, the PAL edition is no more than **£10.** You'll be looking at **£30** for the full 60Hz experience in English though, or a tenner for the Japanese version.

HOW MUCH?!

GOLDENEYE 007

It's rare to see non-graded sealed copies of this N64 hit, which is possibly why this one sold for so much cash. Fifteen bidders were after the game, but only one could win it. The price? **£1,391.33.**

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

MEETING MY HEROES

Paul Drury says, 'I am not worthy,' repeatedly

They say never meet your heroes, which is convenient, because it's not something that usually happens. Writing for **Retro Gamer** since it began in 2004 has given me the opportunity to meet, thank profusely and occasionally get drunk with many of my gaming heroes and for that I am eternally grateful to editors Martyn Carroll and Darran Jones. And now I even get the chance to name-drop shamelessly.

Being a Commodore kid, supping Guinness with Jeff Minter at the RetroVision show back in 2007 and talking about how he coded my favourite game, *Sheep In Space*, felt a bit magical. I've since visited him at his Welsh farmhouse and have been butted in the rear by several of his flock. Knocking a few back with Tony Crowther, the man responsible for so many great C64 titles, was similarly special, and getting to shake hands with *Elite* creators David Braben and Ian Bell was a real honour. They didn't shake each other's hands, mind.

Despite being on the other side of the 8-bit playground wars, visiting Spectrum legend Matthew Smith at his home in Liverpool and sitting at the very desk where he wrote *Manic Miner* is a treasured memory. He stayed over at my house when he spoke at Nottingham's Screenplay Festival in 2005 and lit up a large spliff at the breakfast table, while my daughters grinned at him over their Weetabix.

Trips to the Free Play Florida gaming show mean I've managed to meet some American heroes as well. Given how many hours I mulled over his text adventures as a kid, spending an evening with Scott Adams was fun and fascinating, as he regaled me with tales of how *Adventureland* and *The Count* came to be. I also got to sip a few rum and Cokes with *Q*bert* creator Warren Davis, who happens to be an accomplished magician and dazzled the patrons of various Nottingham boozers with his sleight of hand when he came over to the UK to stay.

In the summer of 2023, I finally flew to the west coast of America with my mate Tony Temple. We hosted talks at California Extreme, a huge gaming and pinball expo in Santa Clara, which is close to where Atari had its first headquarters. We got to meet a whole bunch of legendary arcade developers, including Dave Theurer, the genius behind *Tempest* and *Missile Command*, Ed Logg, who gave us *Asteroids* and *Gauntlet*, and Al Alcorn, who told us about the night he installed the first *Pong* machine in Andy Capp's Tavern in 1972. The highlight was having a beer with Atari cofounder Nolan Bushnell in his local bar, Father's Office, in Santa Monica. He is 80 now, but bounded in, sparkling and fresh-faced, like he'd just jumped out of a hot tub.

> "Nolan Bushnell is 80 now, but he bounded in to the bar, sparkling and fresh-faced, like he'd just jumped out of a hot tub"
>
> **PAUL DRURY**

One day, I hope to visit Japan, preferably in the company of fellow freelancer and Japanophile John Szczepaniak, and share a sake or two with some legends of their arcade industry – I would love to say thank you in person to the mysterious Mr Kawamura, the designer of my favourite coin-op, *Jump Bug*. I have met Masaya Matsuura of *PaRappa The Rapper* fame and Masayuki Uemura, the man behind the NES and the SNES, when they came over to Britain. Uemura-san died in 2021, a poignant reminder that your heroes aren't going to be around forever.

Sadly, he isn't the only legend I have had the pleasure of meeting who has since passed away. For **RG** 7, I interviewed Keith Campbell at his home in Brighton, and was delighted to discover he still had every issue of *CVG* in which his adventure column had appeared. The following month, I visited Archer Maclean in his amazing home-come-arcade and even dipped a toe in his indoor swimming pool, which had a startling Romanesque fresco on the main wall, featuring Archer and Jimmy White in togas. And then in 2009, I got to meet the 'father of videogames', Ralph Baer, who took me down to his basement and showed me his Brown Box – the prototype for the Magnavox Odyssey, the first games console. All three are greatly missed.

I think people warn against meeting your heroes in case you are disappointed. Perhaps you see their feet of clay, or they dismiss you as a sad obsessive or just act like arrogant dicks. Whether I've just been lucky or it's the nature of game designers but every one I've met over the last 20 years has been charming, humble and often quite surprised that anyone cares about some game they wrote decades ago. Or it could be because being in the presence of your idols risks you turning into a giddy, gushing fanboy… ✱

STILL ON THE LIST

MORE HEROES I'D LOVE TO MEET

EUGENE JARVIS
We'll play *Defender* together and I'll be his hyperspace, just as the Beastie Boys suggested.

JOHN NEWCOMER
I'm planning a trip to Galloping Ghost arcade in Chicago and hope to play *Joust* with its designer.

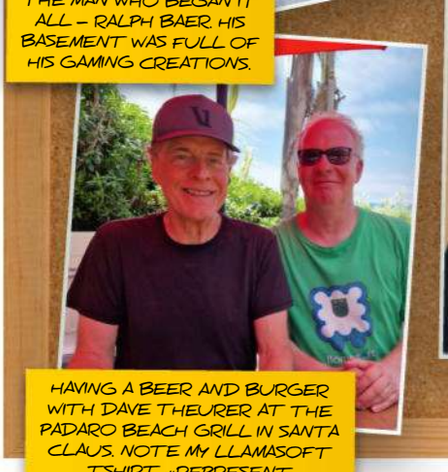
IAN GRAY
I'd love to buy the elusive man behind *Siren City*, *Aquanaut* and *China Miner* a beer.

CHRIS STAMPER
I hope to say thanks for *Jetpac* and get him to sign my *Blue Print* arcade flyer before he sets the dogs on me.

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO
Oh, come on, I can dream.

I KNEW NOLAN BUSHNELL LIKED POETRY SO TO INGRATIATE MYSELF, I BOUGHT HIM A COLLECTION BY MY FAVOURITE POET. NO, NOT WEIRD AT ALL.

THE MAN WHO BEGAN IT ALL – RALPH BAER. HIS BASEMENT WAS FULL OF HIS GAMING CREATIONS.



HAVING A BEER AND BURGER WITH DAVE THEURER AT THE PADARO BEACH GRILL IN SANTA CLAUS. NOTE MY LLAMASOFT T-SHIRT #REPRESENT

I LOVED MEETING Q*BERT CREATOR WARREN DAVIS. THE FEELING MAY NOT HAVE BEEN MUTUAL.
MATT SMITH AND I, SHOWING OFF OUR 'LEGENDARY GAMERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM' POSTERS. YES, I AM NOT WORTHY.
ED LOGG AND I PREPARE TO ENTER THE CALIFORNIA EXTREME KNOBBLY KNEES COMPETITION.
KEITH CAMPBELL WAS THE FIRST HERO OF MINE I GOT TO MEET – A LOVELY MAN AND MUCH MISSED.
I FINALLY GOT TO MEET SCOTT ADAMS IN FLORIDA IN 2017, 13 YEARS AFTER INTERVIEWING HIM FOR THE VERY FIRST DESERT ISLAND DISKS FEATURE. THE T-SHIRT SAYS IT ALL.
PONG CREATOR AL ALCORN AND ROGER HECTOR, WHO DESIGNED WARLORDS. RESPECT DUE.
I HAD THE HONOUR OF PRESENTING JEFF MINTER WITH HIS WALTER DAY TRADING CARD AND POSTER. THE LATTER IS NOW FRAMED AND HANGS ON THE WALL OF HIS LIVING ROOM, NO LESS!
I MET MASAYUKI UEMURA, THE BRAINS BEHIND THE NES AND SNES, IN NOTTINGHAM AND MY PHOTOGRAPHER MATE MATT TAYLOR CAPTURED THE MOMENT FOR POSTERITY.

HERO WORSHIP

Readers reveal their own celebrity encounters

Bobson Dugnutt
Meeting Shigeru Miyamoto at Virgin Megastore early Noughties, for a signing.

Luke The Fox VA
Met Crush 40, Mike Pollock and Takashi Iizuka at Summer Of Sonic in London some years back. They were really great people.

Addster
I interviewed *Tekken* main man Katsuhiro Harada for a martial arts mag. He couldn't have been more accommodating, putting on our shirt and striking cool poses. Top bloke!

PHorV
I once saw Peter Molyneux in Wimbledon Village but he was talking to someone and I was young and I didn't have the balls to approach and say hi #missedopportunity.

alan-c
I met Clive Sinclair in Dublin about 35 years ago and Shigeru Miyamoto when *F-Zero GX* was released in the arcades. Absolutely brilliant.

Noe V.
My daughter and I were at the Disneyland Hotel talking about games that were criminally under-appreciated like *Psychonauts*. A minute later, Tim Schafer turned the corner. It was surreal.

David Sheppard
Meeting the living legend that is John Romero at Revival in Wolverhampton. He was entertaining, charming and seeing that hair never fails to impress.

Michael Loukoumis
Meeting Kojima at the *Peace Walker* launch at HMV on Oxford Street. I still have my signed copy!

William
I saw Iain Lee at the London Gaming Market. I just gave him a discernible nod. Respect!

Joruus
I met Shigeru Miyamoto two years running at ECTS. Despite a clear communication barrier, he was kind enough to stop for a photo. Unfortunately that was before camera phones, and neither picture on my disposable camera worked! Gutted.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

CHANGING THE GAME

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Hearing of the gigantic takeover of Activision by Microsoft is an undoubted game-changer. This could be the best thing to happen to retro gamers in ages, but it could also be the worst. With Activision having such a vast back catalogue, as well as those from its subsidiaries, will Microsoft bring those classics back to life to maybe go on smartphones etc, or will they just draw a line and concentrate on modern systems? It would be nice if someone from Microsoft was available to answer readers' worries and give us an idea of what their thinking is. I would sure love to hear the thoughts of you guys.
Kelvin Courtenay

Thanks for getting in touch, Kelvin. We summed up our thoughts on the acquisition in RG 253. Microsoft does have a decent record when it comes to making older games available, so we're confident it won't let iconic IPs rest if there's money to be made from them.

» [PSP] Kelvin has valid concerns about what Microsoft will do with Activision's back catalogue. We're hoping for an update of *Freeway*.

HAVING A BLAST

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Congrats on 250 issues! I've been subscribing since around the days of issue 29, the one in issue 250's How Much?! section. However, I can't ever recall a feature on *Blast Corps*. Given that at least someone at the magazine liked it enough to hail it as a hidden N64 gem in the Rare cover story, I'd love to see a future piece on it. I sometimes think I'm alone in being charmed by this game.
Michael Bentley

» [Nintendo 64] We're big fans of *Blast Corps* at **Retro Gamer** and would love a sequel.

It's great to hear from a longtime reader, Michael. You'll be pleased to know that we ran a Making Of *Blast Corps* in RG 41, so with any luck you've got it already in your collection.

WHERE'S THE WRESTLING COVERAGE?

Hi Darren,
I was just wondering if you guys ever considered doing a pro wrestling special in **Retro Gamer** magazine? I don't think I've seen a WWF-themed cover or feature on any of the many WWE games in my short few years of buying the magazine.

I think it would be very popular.
Regards,
Jason

» [Dreamcast] Nick and Tim love wrestling. If there was ever a coup on the magazine, this image would probably make the cover.

You're not alone in liking wrestling, Jason. Nick and Tim are both big fans as well. Our wrestling coverage is limited due to lack of access, but we did do a Bluffer's Guide To Wrestling Games in RG 206 and a Minority Report in RG 178, so try tracking those down.

BUDDIES FOR LIFE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I was pleased to see *Team Buddies* in the feature about Psygnosis in issue 252. It's something of an unappreciated gem that is so often overlooked. One thing I would point out is describing it as a RTS doesn't really do it justice and I hope it doesn't put off any would-be *Team Buddies* players. Admittedly, it is an incredibly hard game to categorise; whilst it certainly has some real-time strategy elements I think it would be best described as a third-person shooter crossed with a party game. Perhaps akin to

STAR LETTER

GET WITH THE TIMES

» We've covered aspects of Mike's request in the past, so we'll look at how we can expand it.

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Could you possibly do an article on the many modern ways to enjoy retro gaming today? Let's face it, retro gaming has changed massively since the mag was first released and it would be great if we could have a feature that focussed on these changes.
I'm talking about the improvement in emulation, the many Mini consoles that are now available, upscalers designed for modern TVs, the huge array of books and magazines you can buy and much more. I used to love your How To... guides and it would be great to see them return, or have something similar in the future. I remember an article you did back in issue 200, so maybe you could revisit that or expand it?
Keep up the fantastic work,
Mike Bracken

That's a great idea, Mike. There's probably not enough space in the magazine to cover everything at once, but it's certainly given us something to mull over. Have a book for offering such a great suggestion.

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag Retro Gamer Magazine @RetroGamerMag

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [PlayStation] If anyone reading this worked on *Team Buddies*, we'd love to hear from you.

Fat Princess crossed with *Worms*. It's genre defying. I'm sure there's a great story to tell about its creation and I'd love to read it.

As always, thanks for the fantastic magazine.

Chris Cheeseman

We're glad you enjoyed the article on *Team Buddies*, Chris. And don't worry, if we can track down the developers we'll definitely run an article about it.

A MEGA CAKE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

It would be great if you could print this picture of my brother's birthday cake in your magazine. It was made by my mum Pauline and my dad Chris under my instructions. We all love your magazine. Keep up the good work.

Paul Thompson

That cake looks absolutely delicious, Paul. Nick and Darran both approve of the console choice as well.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Christmas Games

It's that time of year where the team chooses games to play over the festive break. Darran is planning to finish off the *Onimusha* series he started a few months back, while Tim has put *Remnant II* aside to play. Nick has big plans to get through *Astral Chain*, while Andy will most likely stick with modding *Rome Remastered*.

» A Mega Drive you can actually eat? Where do we get one?

» [Dreamcast] *Power Stone 2* was a fantastic multiplayer game as Steve Setser can attest.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Dreamcast game?

Ian Jones
Wild Metal Country. It's just a cracking game with some great physics.

MindThreat
Headhunter, because it proved it could be on the same level as the PS2.

Gavvie-san
Skies Of Arcadia. Cracking music, and a story that really made me fully appreciate longer stories in games. *Shenmue* started my love for RPGs, *Skies* cemented it.

Dragon
Bangai-O. It's such an underrated and fun shoot-'em-up!

Vosslier
I bought my Dreamcast just so I could play *Phantasy Star Online*. I actually bought a copy of the game before I bought the system!

Daniel H
Sturmwind. It's a fun and absolutely gorgeous-looking shoot-'em-up. I think this is the first game that showed me a homebrew project could beat professional ones in terms of production values.

Steven Setser
Power Stone 2. It reminds me of late nights with friends and my older brother. So many laughs and stressful close calls. It was so fun, even my mom would play with us, the only videogame she played with us.

Jason
Sega Rally 2. It may not be as instantly pick up and play as the original, but I can't get enough of its sweet slidey action.

CC
Shenmue. Really stereotypical, but the game is just outstanding. The sheer level of detail packed into every corner was unparalleled until *LA Noire* and *Red Dead Redemption II*.

Kid Marine
Shenmue II is not only my favourite Dreamcast game, but my favourite game full stop. Its massive scope and attention to detail created a world that absorbed me like no other game. I *was* Ryo Hazuki and I really *was* in Hong Kong. It was real. Magic.

Sir_top_&_hat
Confidential Mission. Back then I loved my lightgun games from *The House Of The Dead* to *Virtua Cop* and this gem fitted it superbly.

Peter Weiss
Soulcalibur was simply great for its time. It wasn't like the arcade version but much better!

K.M.R.
Crazy Taxi. It was the main reason I bought the system.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Darran 'Ikaruga' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443
Art Editor **Andy 'Quake III Arena' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Power Stone' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'Shenmue II' Thorpe**
Photographer **Phil 'Space Channel 5' Barker**
Group Art Director **Woz 'Shenmue' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Bangai-O' Mott**

Contributors
Writing Adam Barnes, Martyn Carroll, David Crookes, Mike Diver, Andrew Fisher, Will Freeman, Faith Johnson, Paul Kautz, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Lewis Packwood, Paul Rose

Design Ryan Robbins

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Commercial Finance Director **Tom Swayne**
tom.swayne@futurenet.com
Advertising Director **Tom Parkinson**
tom.parkinson@futurenet.com
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at **licensing@futurenet.com** or view our available content at **www.futurecontenthub.com** .
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

Subscriptions
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Customer service phone line **0330 333 433**
New orders phone line **0330 333 1113**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Senior Marketing Manager **Tom Cooper**

Subscription delays: Disruption issues are currently affecting UK and international delivery networks. Please allow up to seven days before contacting us about a late delivery via help@magazinesdirect.com

Circulation
Circulation Manager **Matthew de Lima**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Advertising Production Coordinator **Emma Thomas**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Controller **Vivienne Calvert**

Management
Managing Director, Games and Ents **Matthew Pierce**
Global Art Director **Rodney Dive**
Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2023 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

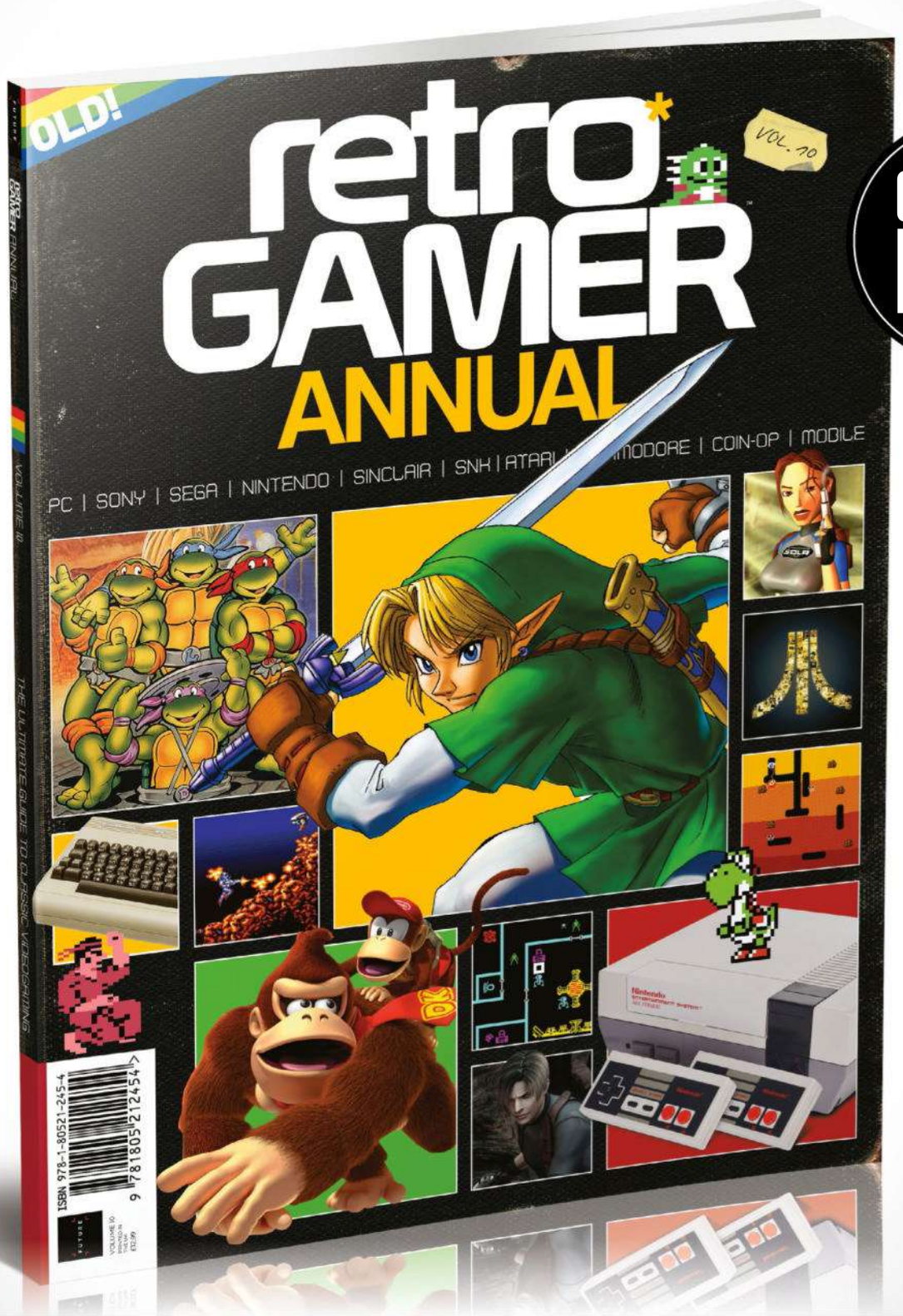
Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

ipso Regulated

Widely Recycled

CELEBRATE THE BEST OF RETRO GAMING IN 2023

We've collated the very best features from Retro Gamer's past 12 months in this fantastic new tome. Whether you enjoy 8-bit computers, classic arcade games, 16-bit consoles or more modern retro franchises, you'll be well-catered for. Don't miss it!



ON SALE NOW

FUTURE

Ordering is easy. Go online at:

magazinesdirect.com

Or get it from selected supermarkets & newsagents

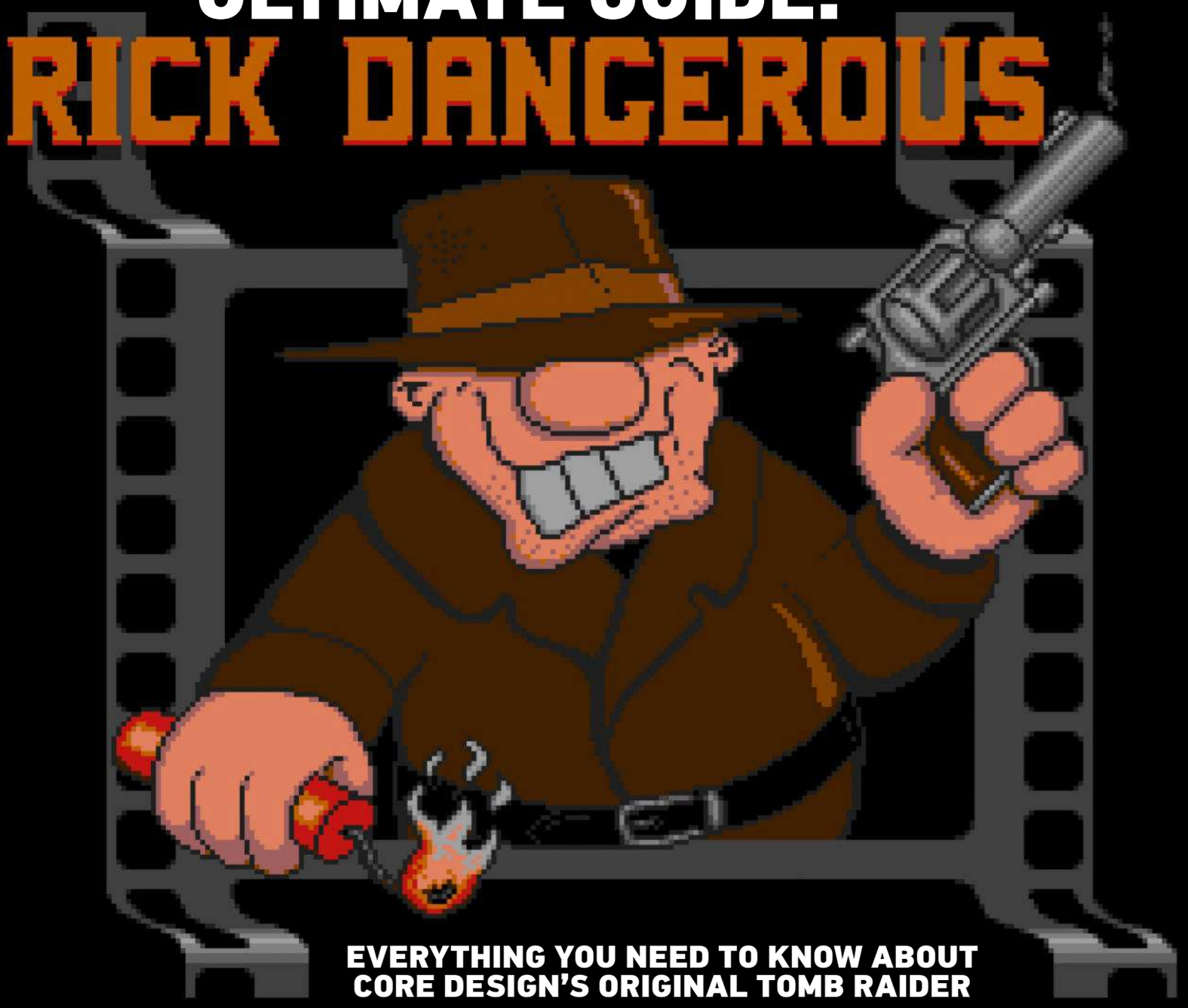
>>LOAD 255

nextmonth

ON SALE 18TH JANUARY 2024

ULTIMATE GUIDE:

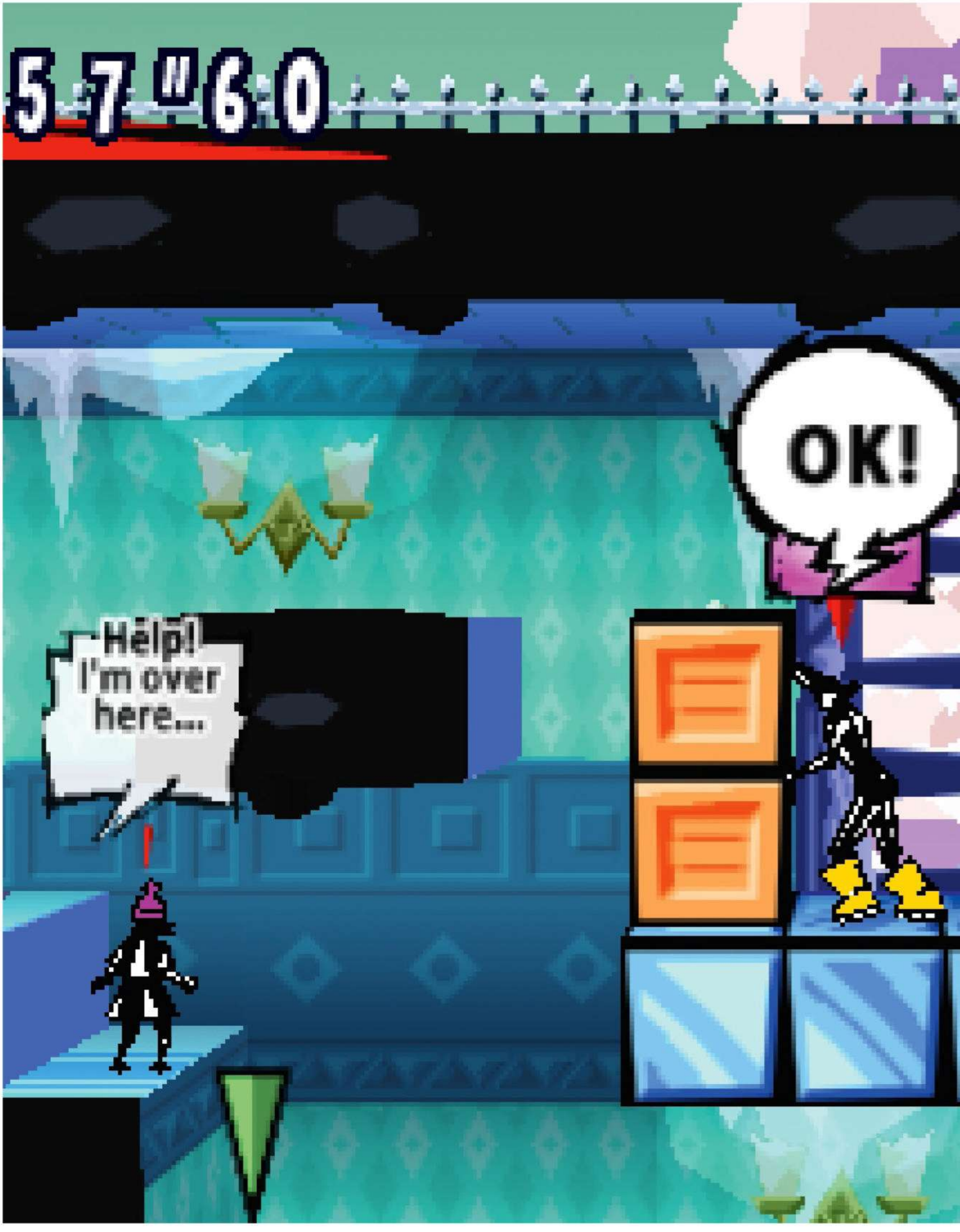
RICK DANGEROUS



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CORE DESIGN'S ORIGINAL TOMB RAIDER

AND MUCH MORE, INCLUDING...

Asteroids, Robotron: 2084, Diablo II, Silent Scope, David Bishop, Budokan: The Martial Spirit, Brøderbund, Advance Wars: Dual Strike, The Nineties: A Decade Of Incredible Games, Homebrew, Vectorman 2, RetroRGB


5'7"60
OK!
Help! I'm over here...

Exit

AN INESCAPABLE PUZZLE EXPERIENCE

» RETROREVIVAL

» PSP » 2005 » TAITO

If you're anything like me, there was a time in your life when the phrase 'credit crunch' was enough to set you off. Graduating into the worst employment market for over a decade wasn't one of the best experiences I've ever had, and with no job I ended up as a live-in carer at the university. It was only meant to be a temporary thing, but it ended up lasting six months – a long time to go without any home consoles. I greatly appreciated Sony's efforts to provide a home-console experience on the go with the PSP at that time, but I had plenty of pockets of downtime during the day that didn't exactly accommodate a *God Of War* session.

Thankfully, *Exit* was there to fill those gaps. This stylish early release for the handheld casts you as Mr Esc, an escapologist whose goal is to escape various disasters while saving those trapped with him. In practice, the game's slightly stiff platforming feels somewhat like *Prince Of Persia*, but with an added strategic element in the form of your companions – they may be able to fit through small gaps or push heavier objects, and you can direct them around as you see fit to retrieve tools and aid in getting everyone out alive.

What made *Exit* so valuable to me was that it was a meaty experience that could easily sustain a lengthy evening session of puzzle solving, but also one that was designed with busy people in mind. It packs 100 levels as standard and they're all reasonably short, with time limits never exceeding fifteen minutes and most being under ten, so it fit effortlessly into those sub-hour slots of free time. One hundred more free DLC stages awaited once I was done with those, so the game kept me occupied for weeks on end. If you're looking for a more traditional handheld experience on Sony's machine, give it a try.

ENDGAME

DARK WIZARD

» This entertaining Sega CD exclusive is an epic RPG that PAL gamers sadly missed out on. Sega's game features four distinct heroes, and they all have their own ending to discover. However, it's Amon's ending that we'll be revisiting here. Now you can actually see what you've been missing out on after all these years.

01

» With the land saved from evil, everyone celebrates. As the vampire hunter Amon leaves the party, he can't help but notice that his employer is watching him leave. "Did he see me steal that gold?" he asks himself.

02

» Amon has more to worry about than petty theft. It turns out that his employer is an evil vampire and a top-tier one too. You'd think Amon's vampire hunting instincts would have kicked in, but no, he was lost in his thievery. Silly Amon.

03

» Amon attempts to cover up his theft by striking down the evil vampire, but an innocent bystander gets in his way and takes the full brunt of Amon's desperate attack. Poor Susan, it's not a good day to be a vampire's lackey.

04

» Enraged by the loss of his favourite servant, the vampire strikes Amon down, hoping to turn the thieving hunter and avenge Susan in one fell swoop. The irony of a vampire hunter being turned into a vampire isn't lost on Amon.

05

» Amon is saved at the last minute by Sabrina, who stabs the vampire with her sword. "And that's for killing Susan," Amon exclaims, driving Sabrina's sword deeper into the dying vampire. A thief, a liar and a stealer of kills, what a cad Amon is.

Advertisement

WE'VE GOT THE OPTIONS. YOU MAKE THE CHOICE.
Car, home and travel insurance plus broadband, breakdown cover and more. Get more info or compare quotes, for over 40 products, at go.compare
GO. COMPARE

win prizes facebook

CHILLOUT GAMES

where gamers collect

www.chilloutgames.co.uk/Sell

Trustpilot

Get Xmas £££ For Your Games:

£188

£146

£194

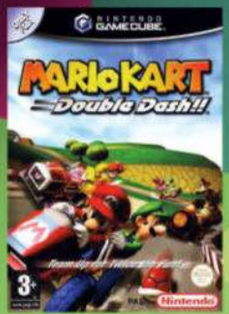
£208

£21

£331

£41

£26



£18

£104

£91

£11

FREE PARCELFORCE DOORSTEP COLLECTION

FAST PAYMENT

Prices valid 17/12/23 and subject to change daily. Prices are for PayPal (Shop Credit add 12% more).
Chillout Games and retro-games.co.uk are trading names of Chillout Games Ltd.
Full terms & conditions can be found at at www.chilloutgames.co.uk